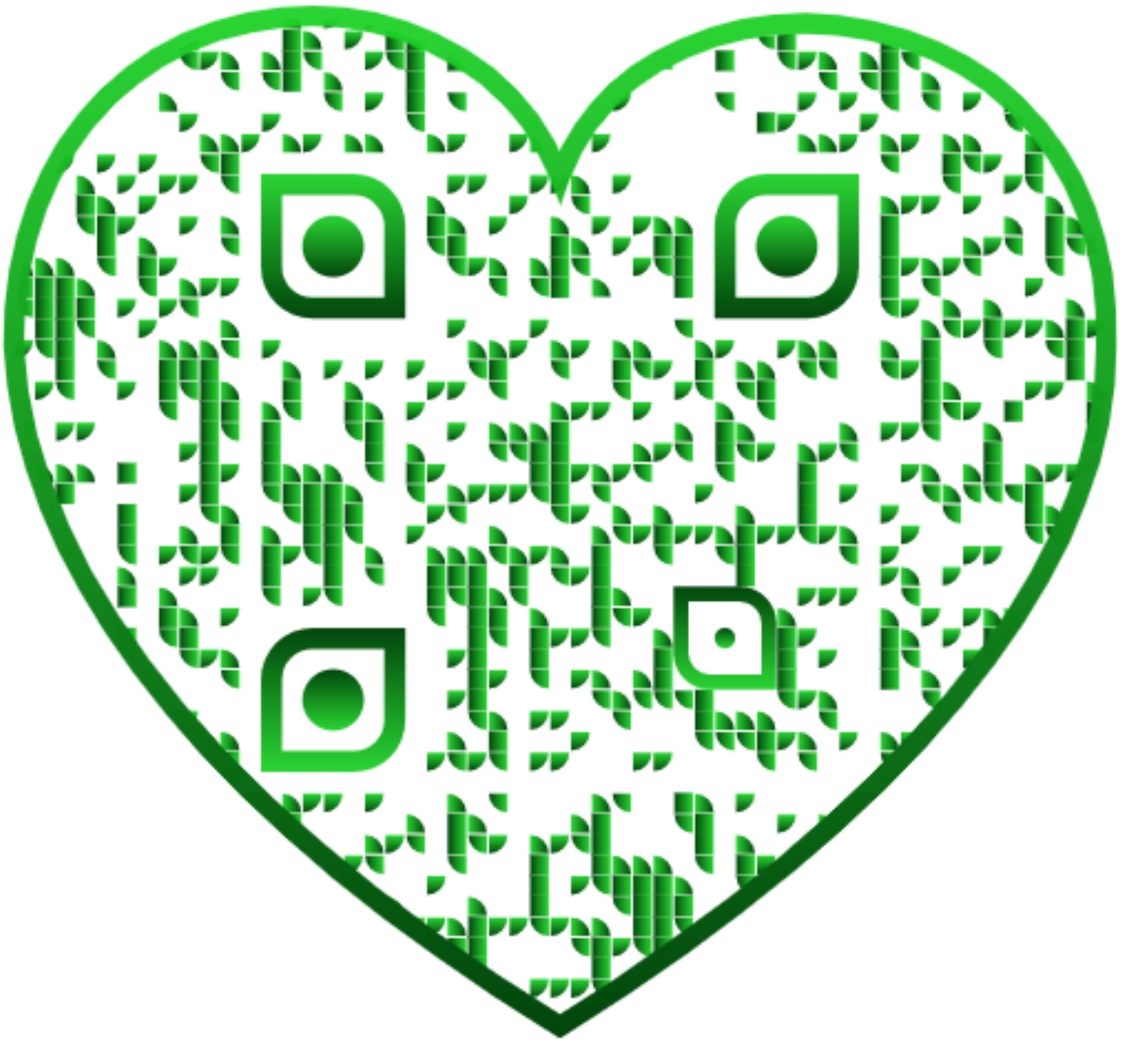
THE ULTIMATE RECORD COLLECTION

THE 500 Greatest Albums Of The 2000s ...ranked!

(Spoiler: he's in)

FROM THE MAKERS OF UNCUT



MIKE GUASTELLA/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

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WELCOME

to *The 500 Greatest Albums Of The 2000s... Ranked!*

IF there's a key self-referential phrase which still holds water from the records of 20 years ago, it's "Quiet is the new loud". Back in 2001 it was the name of an excellent album by the lovely Norwegian group Kings Of Convenience (included, of course, in the collection of fine music we've democratically assembled for you here). But it was also a kind of ethos.

As Fleet Fox Robin Pecknold explains in his excellent introductory interview which starts on page 4, from his point of view the 2000s were a simpler time. So dominant was the aggressive and neurotic nu-metal which was the big commercial force in rock music as the 1990s turned into the 2000s, that the choice was clear cut: it became a key mission to find an escape in other – better – sounds.

For Robin, this meant drinking in the weekly dramas of The Libertines, and following the explosion of The Strokes and White Stripes as they were chronicled in the British music press. As his own musical mission developed it became obvious that retreating into quieter, folkier sounds, more like the Joni Mitchell records he grew up listening to in his parents' record collection could hold the answer.

He wasn't the only one. After a series of personal and romantic disappointments, Justin Vernon took himself off to a remote Wisconsin cabin to develop one of the most influential sounds of the next 10 years. A minimal, tender and eerie album, there's a feeling in Bon Iver's *For Emma, Forever Ago* album of an attempt to strip away inessential elements and reconnect with the essence of music making.

You'll find something like it in the bare bones of *"Love And Theft"*, part of our cover star Bob Dylan's vital career reset in the period. This tendency didn't mean you needed to be a luddite to look for it, though: you'll also find it in the electronics of *Kid A* and *In Rainbows* or the icy synths of Portishead's *Third*. The band's song "Machine Gun", *Uncut* wrote at the time, was "a folk song from a Britain broken so much more intimately and profoundly than anyone had guessed."

Back on our call, Robin Pecknold is characteristically humble about his role in defining the aesthetic of the latter part of the decade. "All it took was playing a few tasteful references," he tells Mark Beaumont. "There wasn't any streaming, so it was a little bit easier to have obscure influences because there wasn't that access to everything. It seemed easier compared to now, because now what's happening in the mainstream isn't quite as weird and bad. It was a more innocent time."

Enjoy the peace and quiet, and enjoy the magazine.

JOHN ROBINSON, EDITOR

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Robin Pecknold in 2011: "Really early success can be hard"

"It was insane. I still feel a bit cracked"

FLEET FOXES mainstay ROBIN PECKNOLD was one of the linchpins of the early-21st-century shift to immersive folky rock. To introduce this new issue, he modestly recalls his part in the era, his contemporaries, and staking out his songs in quiet times. "I'm trying to take as little credit as possible," he tells Mark Beaumont. "A record becomes part of a larger conversation."

FOR Robin Pecknold, the past is increasingly less of a foreign country. "It's good that we get these retrospectives," he argues. "The present always feels a bit weird and it's only with hindsight you can appreciate what was unique about it. Sometimes you can't really hear that in the moment. You're just like, 'Oh, this is just more songs, I'm not hearing what's new about this.'"

Over the course of our Zoom call, the mists gradually lift on the 2000s; a decade of such frenetic musical pace and possibility that its sheer agitation must have felt universes removed from the lush, silken textures of Pecknold's dream-folk Seattle band Fleet Foxes. Yet their self-titled 2008 debut album did as much to define the decade's latter half as the rabble-rousers of New York, Detroit, Sheffield or Whitechapel did its early years. With its wintry, ghost-dimension evocations of The Beach Boys, The Band and Crosby, Stills & Nash, *Fleet Foxes* – alongside Bon Iver's *For Emma, Forever Ago* – marked the global emergence of 21st-century folk-influenced rock.

Fleet Foxes broke the *Billboard* 40, made No 3 in the UK and woke the world to the US underground's swerve towards melodic clarity. In its wake, on the US scene at least, the decade's excitable nature calmed. Febrile guitar and electronic sounds gave way to richer, more lustrous textures and atmospheres. The stage was set for The War On Drugs, Kevin Morby and a belated mainstream appreciation of The National.

"I'm trying to take as little credit as possible," Pecknold says, admitting to still feeling a little damaged by his debut's breakout success and uncomfortable with the acclaim, but undoubtedly a main driver in music's subsequent drift into the dreamlike.

How were the early 2000s for you?
"I was pretty young. I was born in '86, so early 2000s, I guess I was 14 to 20."

What was big for you musically?
"Joni Mitchell was pretty huge. My dad was a bass player and he really admired Jaco Pastorius. He made bass guitars and loved Weather Report and Joni Mitchell's *Shadows And Light* live album. When I was 13 and 14 I started getting into that stuff through him and started to learn how to play guitar and just got really into Joni Mitchell. I had to play the dulcimer to play some of the songs on *Blue* and started playing guitars in alternate tunings, because they were easier to learn in alternate tunings than in standard. You could just do certain bar shapes and it sounded exactly like the record. I was really into that stuff in my teen years and also The Strokes and stuff that started coming out in 2001."

We were under the impression that The Strokes and the New York scene wasn't too big in the US at that time.
"Well, I was reading *NME* and *Uncut* because there was a Barnes & Noble near my parents' house and I would go there and get the UK magazines. So I remember watching The Strokes stuff blow up in the UK from the States. *Pitchfork* was still a little bit – not amateur, but it was a little bit loose and I think the vibe was that bands would break in the UK and you had to be paying attention to what the UK press was excited about. The *NME* especially, being a weekly thing and there being weekly drama with The Libertines, it was this thing that had a lot of impact."

PIETER M VAN HATTEM

What was the scene like in America?
"I guess it was a lot of nu metal, Linkin Park. But then obviously Radiohead was really important and making really amazing records – *Kid A* was coming out around that time. The really big stuff was pretty weird. People who had different tastes paid more attention to what the UK was championing, or stuff being made in the UK, perhaps."

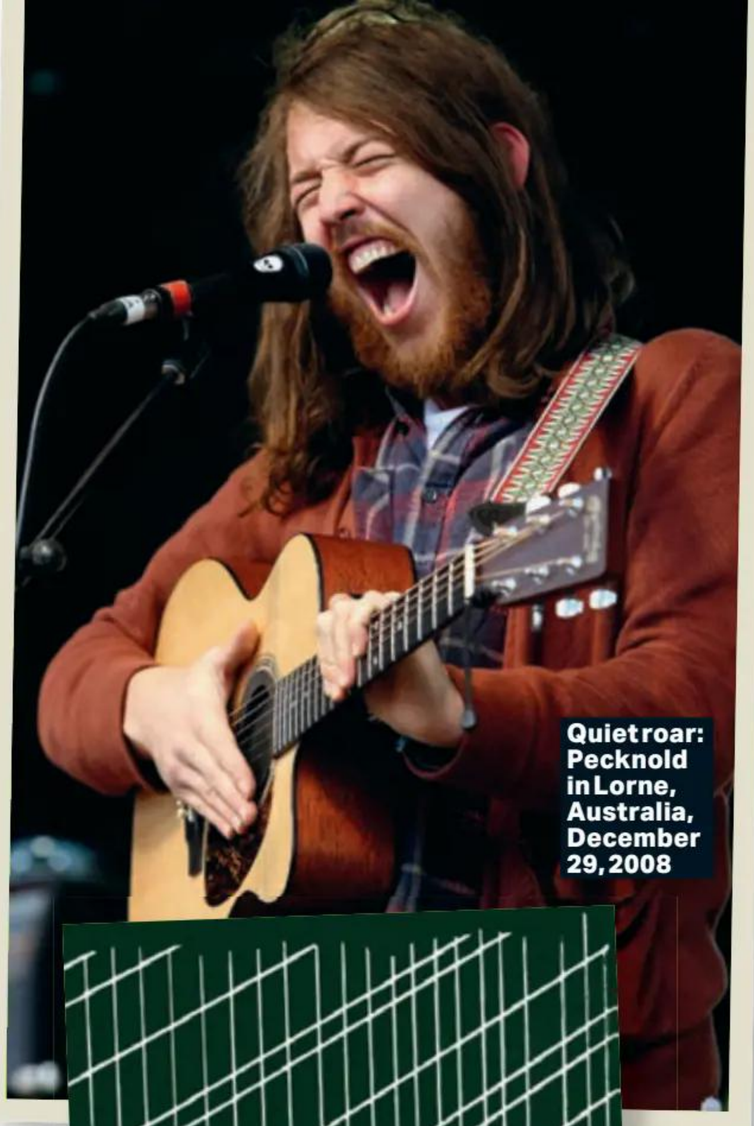
What was happening in Seattle?
"Seattle was slightly different because there were things like K Records, Up Records, Sub Pop or Barsuk. By the late '90s there were pretty significant indie rock records coming out, *The Glow, Part 2* by The Microphones or *There's Nothing Wrong With Love* by Built to Spill. Growing up in Seattle, that stuff felt pretty big and so that was another thing to pay attention to. That wasn't the nu metal that was being put on MTV in the years following Nirvana. You had different contexts. The Microphones are big in the Northwest and Beat Happening – in the Northwest, all that stuff seemed really big and Sub Pop seemed like a huge force. And then by 2004 it was The Shins and stuff was changing."

Did websites like *Pitchfork* represent a turning point in the US reclaiming what was going on?
"Yeah, I think that's fair. They started breaking bands in the same way that you would see the *NME* or *Q* or *Uncut* break bands before. If it was like Clap Your Hands Say Yeah or Tapes 'N Tapes, they would hype something up and that would gain a lot of traction and it really made an impact in the same way that *NME* had been doing for a while. That started working and they clarified what their perspective was or what it was that they were championing and the thread of that development started to make sense and started to pay off."

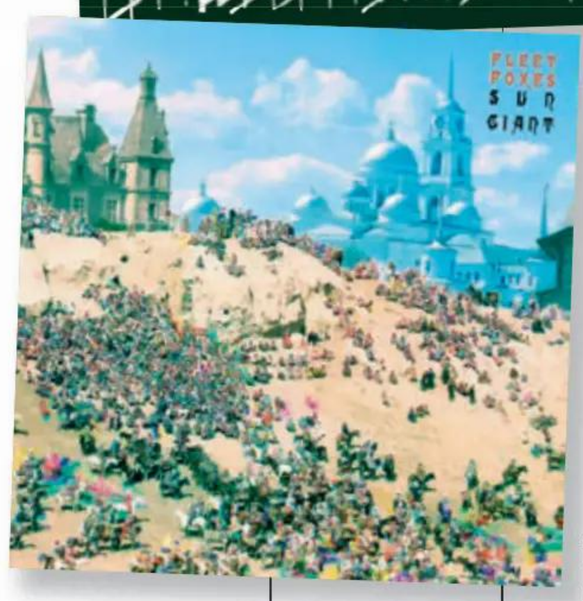
Were people ready for something a bit gentler?
"Yeah. It's funny because one band that was huge for me growing up was Modest Mouse. They were a big band in the Northwest in the late '90s and then signed to a major label and were putting stuff out, I guess, at the same time as The Strokes and The White Stripes and stuff. But it was always their quieter, more melancholy songs I really liked, even on the earlier rock records, and how shaggy and busted the tones were, that was super cool. There would be things like that in the Northwest that would foreshadow The Shins or something, as far as, like, there's been room for this gentler thing but also that's new in a certain way."

Were The Shins the key band in that evolution, or was it Fleet Foxes?
"Definitely The Shins. We were inspired by The Shins, so I think we've got to give them that credit for sure."

How was it making music at that point?
"I graduated high school in 2004 and I should have gone to college but my folks didn't have a lot of money at that time. My siblings didn't get degrees that they did anything with and I was super passionate about music, so I thought I would just give it a shot for a couple years. Just being in Seattle and being in bands instead of going to school. I was a little bit poisoned by the idea that the musical heroes I had hadn't studied music, and I thought it was cooler to not study anything. You found your own thing better if you didn't absorb too much outside information. I don't agree with that necessarily any more, but that was my guiding principle back then. I just started working at a health-food store and started playing shows a lot. And then I started working in this restaurant called the Cha Cha in Seattle where it was all musicians that worked there and it was just listening to music for six hours a day on your shift. It was just so fun because everyone was bringing in the coolest stuff. We were listening to Suicide or Vashti Bunyan or Sibylle Baier, people were playing the coolest stuff. That was an incredible musical education. For an 18-, 19-year-old who was obsessed with music to get to work with these guys who were in bands but listening to only the coolest stuff all day was super fun. I had a really small apartment in Seattle in a neighbourhood called Capitol Hill. We were doing Fleet Foxes by this point but we would practise in my parents' basement. Eventually we got a practice space downtown at a big complex that had a bunch of other bands practising there. I would go there and work on stuff in the middle of the night, walk a couple miles from my apartment down to the practice space and then stay there all night working on stuff. I had an MBOX and a laptop in there to be recording stuff onto and I think there was a cassette tape machine that we would record onto sometimes."



Quiet roar: Pecknold in Lorne, Australia, December 29, 2008



The first two Fleet Foxes EPs: their self-titled, self-released 2006 debut "Sun Giant" from 2008

Who were your contemporaries?
"Band Of Horses rehearsed down there. We'd pass them in the hallway and watch their ascent and end up working with the same producer, Phil Ek. There was a band called The Bats Of Belfry that were this legendary band in Seattle that never made an album but there was a period of a couple of years where everyone was like, 'This is the next great Seattle band, after Nirvana, it's going to be The Bats Of Belfry.' And then they ended up breaking up.

There were some metal bands, a band called the Crystal Skulls, and then the Band Of Horses offshoot band Grand Archives practised there too. It was cool. The producer Blake Mills was in Band Of Horses for a couple of tours and I remember briefly meeting him in the hallway.

Fleet Foxes' original lineup, March 2008: (l–r) Casey Wescott, Christian Wargo, Robin Pecknold, Nicholas Peterson and Skye Skjelset

WENDY REDFERN/REDFERNS; KRISTIAN DOWLING/GETTY IMAGES

Finding their Fleet: in 2008 with (far right) new drummer Josh Tillman; (inset) influences Joanna Newsom, Bon Iver and Devendra Banhart

That was almost 20 years ago, which is crazy."

Was there a general desire to make expansive-sounding music?

"It was one of those things where, like, if you're gonna go in at 6pm then you'd have to turn everything up to 10 to just hear yourself over every other band practising in there. That's why I would stay so late, because once everyone left I could be quiet and write songs and stuff. But it was cool to be in the practice space where everything was happening and all the bands were coming through and people were playing with each other and fighting with each other. It was sweet."

What were the big themes of the age?

"It seems like indie now is very lyrics-based to a certain degree, even with a band like Dry Cleaning where you don't even need melody so much as it's just this really cool story and you can even just be reciting something almost like poetry. Back then, people were finding new ways to sing, new instrument combinations or effects. But it wasn't so much a lyrical era. It was more about sound, the way words sounded or what they were evoking. How that felt fresh."

How was it working with Sub Pop at that point?

"It was good. Jonathan Poneman was really cool, Megan Jasper was really cool. It was my dream to sign to Sub Pop. Instead of going to college and getting a degree I was like, 'I'll try and get signed to Sub Pop and that'll be the payoff of my 18 to 22 period.' They were super sweet. I can't imagine going into business with, like, a 20-year-old. Like, 'We're gonna enter into a business arrangement with this literal child and assume everything's gonna go well and they're going to be able to handle it.' That must be strange to be a label and be working with artists, but they were super sweet and super supportive. They were riding high on The Shins and Iron And Wine and so they were able to sign a lot of stuff in town. They opened a subsidiary label called Hardly Art."

How was the Fleet Foxes breakthrough for you?

"It was pretty insane. I still feel a little bit cracked from it, I guess, to be honest with you. I still feel a bit cracked. I've been super lucky and gotten to do all these really amazing things and work with amazing people and it's been quite an adventure and continues to be. Like, cool stuff keeps happening. But I think really early success can be hard and the younger you are the harder it is. If you're 12, then that can be a lifelong struggle if you let it be, or if it's too intense. And if you're 22 it can be too, some people don't survive it. But I'm glad for all of it now."

As much as you credit The Shins for the late-2000s shift towards softer styles, *Fleet Foxes* was the record that made the most impact in ushering in a more immersive era.

"There were bits and pieces of a lot of stuff that was really inspiring that made its way onto the first Fleet Foxes album. It was stuff from the '60s or '70s or stuff from the 2000s or even people like Joanna Newsom or Devendra Banhart and the freak folk stuff. Or Vetiver. I feel like there were bits and pieces of all of that stuff that was inspiring for the first Fleet Foxes album. Maybe seeing those things edited together in a way that hadn't been done before felt like a fresh or impactful thing from afar. I'm trying to take as little credit as possible. That's how it often works and then that goes on. A record becomes part of a larger conversation, and that informs the next record, which then informs the next thing, all different artists, but it just keeps going. Now you see Noah Kahan selling out arenas."

Bon Iver's debut album received its first label release around the same time as *Fleet Foxes* – what did you make of it?

"Oh my god. His voice is so incredible. We were probably just both inspired by the same things and on a similar wavelength, because I think his record came out around the same time. It's not like he was influenced by our record or whatever. It was just part of the same general interest or passion around taking things in a certain direction. When his record came out, and his voice was just so singular, it's just like wow, what a crazy, crazy sound."

Looking back, what are your impressions of the decade now?

"It's interesting. I feel like in a lot of ways it was easier. We were coming from this context of nu metal, stuff was a little bit weird in the late '90s, early 2000s, and so it was easier to make something good because what you were comparing it to was so weird. All it took was playing a few tasteful references and there wasn't any streaming, so it was a little bit easier to have obscure influences because there wasn't pure access that everyone had to everything. We could go crate-digging and find some weird psych-folk album and be inspired by that, an album that like 500 people had heard. It seemed easier compared to now, because now what's happening in the mainstream isn't quite as weird and bad. The rules just seem completely different now. It's was a more innocent time." ●

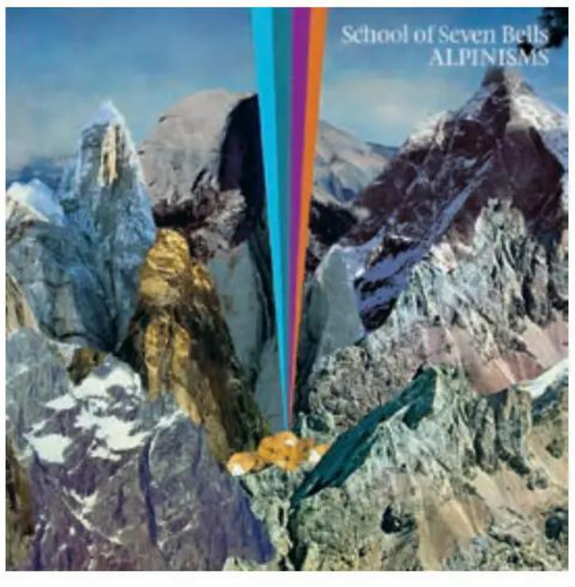
"Instead of going to college to get a degree I was, 'I'll try and get signed to Sub Pop'"

WENDY REDFERN/REDFERNS; MAURITS SILLEM/GETTY IMAGES; TITIA HAHNE/REDFERNS

500 GORILLAZ DEMON DAYS

PARLOPHONE, 2005

The moment that Gorillaz superseded Blur in Damon Albarn's career trajectory. With the aid of Shaun Ryder, De La Soul and more, breakthrough hits "Feel Good Inc", "Dare" and "Dirty Harry" turned his cartoon band, on an exploratory second album, from guest-laden side-project to major international prospect.



499 SCHOOL OF SEVEN BELLS ALPINISMS

GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL, 2008

Secret Machines' Ben Curtis and On!Air!Library!'s Deheza twins combined their formidable talents in experimental dream pop on SOSB's debut, where shoegaze, afrobeat, electronic psychedelia and leftfield pop found an elemental melodic harmony. A key nu-gaze text.

496 AMIINA KURR

BLÁSKJÁR, 2007

Sublime string, chime, synth and vocal debut from Sigur Rós's touring and studio string quartet, occupying very much the same bewitching Icelandic territory. Glaciers melt, icicles twinkle and dreamlike multi-harmonies drift from fog. Did we dream it?

495 BROADCAST AND THE FOCUS GROUP INVESTIGATE WITCH CULTS OF THE RADIO AGE

WARP, 2009

A haunting chopped-and-screwed collaboration between Ghost Box Records co-founder Julian House and Birmingham's frontmost sampledeliacs. Nursery rhymes, horror clips, spectral laughter and ancient mantras blend and clash.

492 GIRLS ALBUM TRUE PANTHER SOUNDS, 2009

The early-'60s Beach Boys/Beatles/Spector melodic ethos got drenched in alt-rock noise, millennial anxiety and the fracturing-psyche melodies of singer Christopher Owens on the San Fran duo's debut. "Hellhole Ratrace" was far more heavenly than the title suggested; "Lust For Life" far more tormented.

491 FEVER RAY FEVER RAY

RABID, 2009

A colder, spookier sisterpiece to The Knife's 2006 album *Silent Shout*, the Fever Ray debut found Karin Dreijer exploring less frivolous territory, leaning towards the more spare and claustrophobic sides of Underworld, Björk and Kate Bush.

488 CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG 5:55

BECAUSE MUSIC, 2006

Air and Jarvis Cocker were among the collaborators helping lure Gainsbourg back to the studio after two decades for her first album as an adult; a fittingly breathy Anglo-Gallic affair full of glamorous plane crashes and relationships dissected in autopsy terms.

487 BONNIE "PRINCE" BILLY THE LETTING GO

DRAG CITY, 2006

Recording with Björk's producer in Reykjavík suited the sparse delicacies in Oldham's songwriting and Dawn McCarthy's sensitive background touches. Intimate exposes like "Love Comes To Me" and "Strange Form Of Life" made for a Bonnie career high.

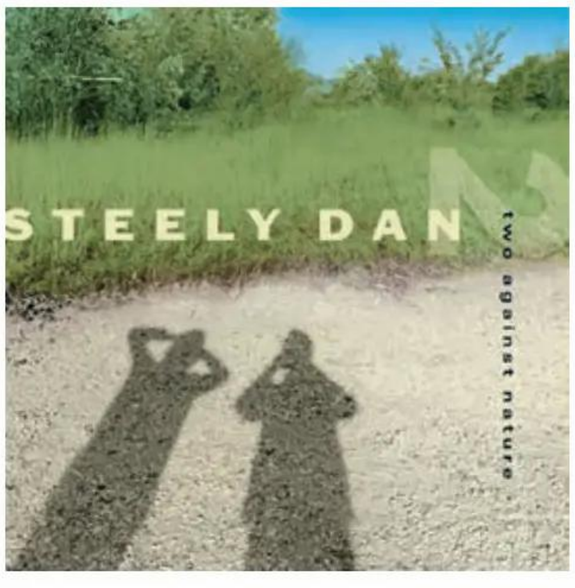
484 GRUPPO DI IMPROVVISAZIONE NUOVA CONSONANZA AZIONI DIE SCHACHTEL, 2006

Franco Evangelisti, Giovanni Piazza and one Ennio Morricone were among the composers to emerge from Rome's pioneering avant-garde '60s ensemble GDINC, here found exploring free jazz, abstract electronics and concrète in restored recordings from 1967-69.

483 2MANYDJS AS HEARD ON RADIO SOULWAX PT 2

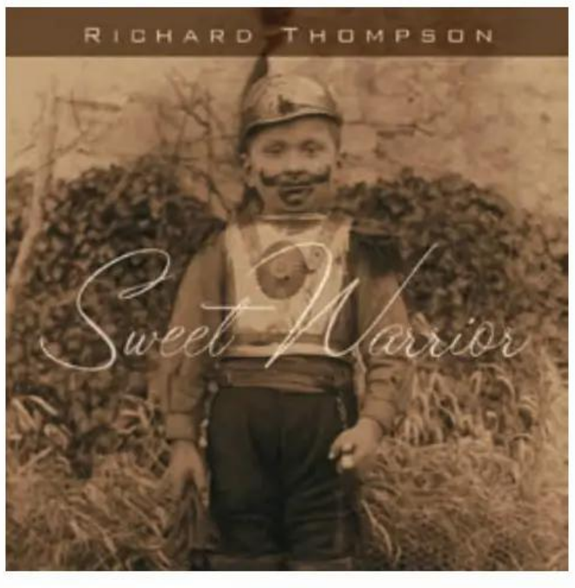
PLAY IT AGAIN SAM, 2003

Remixing and mashing up a vast array of samples from Dolly Parton, Basement Jaxx, Peaches, Garbage and 10cc, David and Stephen Dewaele's DJ spin-off from Soulwax came into its own as a major clubland phenomenon. "Dynamite," said David Bowie.



498 STEELY DAN
TWO AGAINST NATURE GIANT, 2000

Post-funk? Certainly Walter Becker and Donald Fagen's first studio album in 20 years strutted and grooved on down some uncharted jazz-pop roads. *Gaucho* and Fagen's *Kamakiriad* were starting points, and middle-aged lust a lingering theme, but *Two Against Nature* was more reinvigoration than tired rehash.

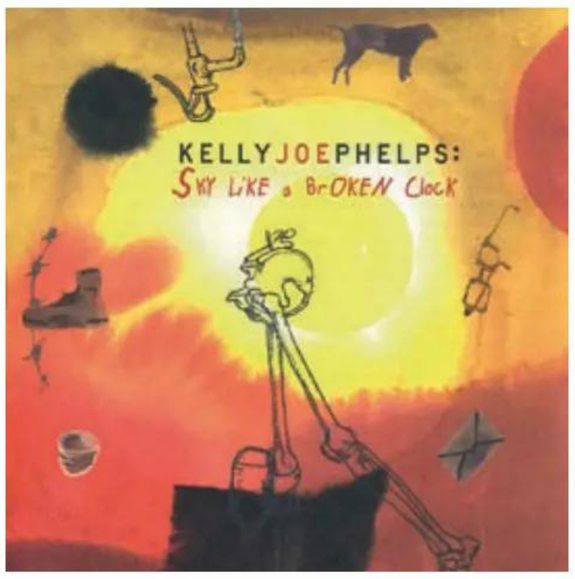


497 RICHARD THOMPSON
SWEET WARRIOR PROPER, 2007

Struggling sex workers, terrified Iraq War soldiers, terrorist recruiters and cheating ceilidh musicians were among the vibrant characters populating Thompson's broadest-sweeping album of the decade. Reggae, R&B, rockabilly, shanty and Celtic passions all add colour to the vibrant folk-rock.

494 LADYTRON
604 INVICTA HI-FI, 2001

Liverpool's answer to New York electroclash delivered icy synth-pop aplenty, with "The Way That I Found You", "He Took Her To A Movie" and "Playgirl" the most Kraftwerkian pop delights sparking from a dazzling debut.



493 KELLY JOE PHELPS
SKY LIKE A BROKEN CLOCK RYKODISC, 2001

The delta jazz lap-steel maestro's fourth was a smoky blues catalogue of dark, downbeat and oblique narratives: sinners, low-lives and shadowy strugglers. Recorded live with no overdubs, and all the more evocative for it.

490 DEERHUNTER
CRYPTOGRAMS KRANKY, 2007

Recorded in two separate day-long sessions, Bradford Cox's second album fell neatly into distinct ambient and psych-pop halves, conjoined by Cox's stream-of-consciousness meditations on death, friendship and his experiences of Marfan's syndrome.

489 OKKERVIL RIVER
BLACK SHEEP BOY JAGJAGUWAR, 2005

Named after the Tim Hardin song that opens the album, the third record from the Austin band helmed by Will Sheff – rendered homeless at the time of recording – shares Hardin's broken tone and theme, but with a dynamic attack, inventive texture and Wurlitzer groove all its own.

486 FENNESZ
ENDLESS SUMMER MEGO, 2001

Glitch techniques are brought to bear on the Austrian experimental artist's melodic guitar lines to create a third album of skewed soundscapes and unsettled bliss states. The Beach Boys in a digital breakdown, perhaps.

485 CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH
CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH WICHITA, 2005

Cosmic came out to party on the expansive Philadelphia outfit's debut. "The Skin On My Yellow Country Teeth", "In This Home On Ice" and "On A Tidal Wave Of Young Blood" particularly resembled Talking Heads twirling away into indiepop ether.

482 KEANE
UNDER THE IRON SEA ISLAND, 2006

Intended to portray "a sinister fairy tale world gone wrong", the follow-up to soft rock smash *Hopes And Fears* added more electronic elements and darker orchestral textures, all the better to tackle themes such as the Iraq War, inter-band tensions and the terrors of ageing.

481 BASEMENT JAXX
ROOTY XL, 2001

Brixton house party-starters concoct one of the decade's most infectious dance-pop records. "Romeo" and the Gary Numan-sampling "Where's Your Head At" are the headline bops, but P-funk, Princely soul, Motown, drum'n'bass and krautrock play extraordinarily groovy parts elsewhere.

480 MY MORNING JACKET
EVIL URGES
ATO, 2008

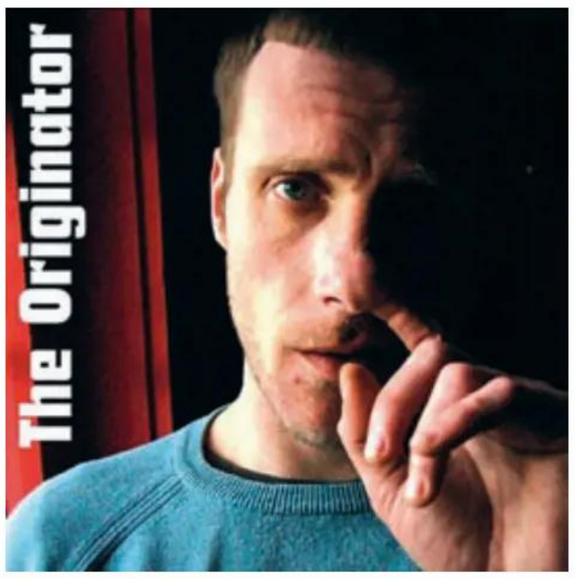
Southern psychedelia proving a straitjacket, Jim James wickedly breaks out of the alt-country box into prog, funk and, on "Highly Suspicious", the falsetto electro-grooves of a hairy rock Cameo. "I'm Amazed"? Us too.

479 SONGS: OHIA
DIDN'T IT RAIN
SECRETLY CANADIAN, 2002

Not, despite everything your cochlea might tell you, recorded in a windowless Laurel Canyon basement in 1972, but the 2002 work of Jason Molina, following up 2000's oppressive *Ghost Tropic* with a lighter but still claustrophobic collection.

476 MUSE
BLACK HOLES AND REVELATIONS
WARNER BROS, 2006

The sci-fi themes and deep-state conspiracies of *Absolution* were given a Depeche Mode dusting and a dilithium thrust on the Devon space rocker's dazzling fourth. On Earth, astute warnings of political corruption and power cabals; in the heavens, ancient Martian wars and giant black holes.



475 SLEAFORD MODS
THE ORIGINATOR
A52 SOUNDS, 2009

"Sleaford Mods. I don't like it any more than you do – but it works." Pre-Andrew Fearn it may be, but Jason Williamson always knew how to write a tune. Uncleared samples, phlegm, unrepeatable sentiments, excellent jokes... The only way was up for Sleafords, but down sounded pretty good too.

472 THE WHITE STRIPES
ICKY THUMP
WARNER BROS/THIRD MAN, 2007

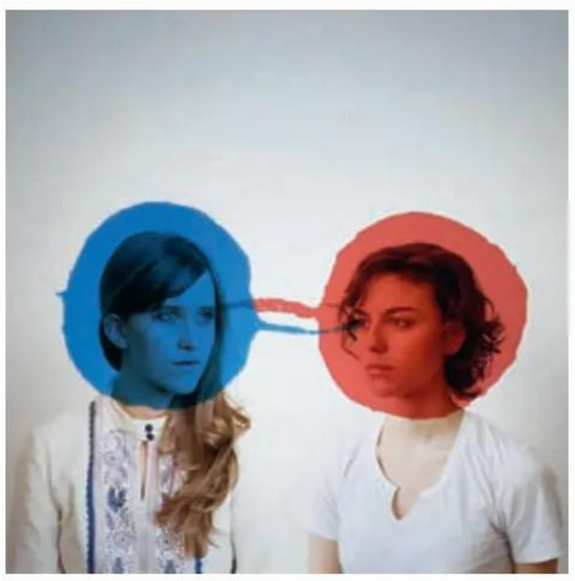
Returning to garage blues after the more refined *Get Behind Me Satan*, and touching on power rock ("You Don't Know What Love Is...") and traditional Scottish music ("Prickly Thorn, But Sweetly Worn"), the Stripes' final studio album made for a punchy swansong.

471 HOLY FUCK
HOLY FUCK
DEPENDENT, 2005

Improvised live and driven by a real-life drummer, the eight tracks on the Canadian electronic duo's debut album took on an organic frisson that bridged the gap between New York funk punk and the wild-wire experiments of Battles.

468 IKARA COLT
CHAT AND BUSINESS
FANTASTIC PLASTIC, 2002

A very British and virulent art-rock cousin to the funk punk that was taking over the New York underground, Ikara Colt's debut sounded born of an unholy union of Sonic Youth, The Fall and the Sex Pistols.



467 DIRTY PROJECTORS
BITTE ORCA
DOMINO, 2009

The fifth from Brooklyn's alt-pop deconstructionists continued David Longstreth's mission to tear apart his indie-pop melodies at a molecular level, utilising cranky time signatures, noise bursts and Frankenstein genre-chopping to reveal the strange beauty in his songs.

464 THE PASTELS
THE LAST GREAT WILDERNESS
GEOGRAPHIC/DOMINO, 2003

Soundtracking David Mackenzie's film of the same name, and boasting just two songs including their cover of Sly & The Family Stone's "Everybody Is A Star" and Jarvis Cocker singing the breezy horticultural sleaze of "I Picked A Flower", *TLGW* found The Pastels stripped to their atmospheric bones.

463 JARVIS COCKER
JARVIS
ROUGH TRADE, 2006

Between its languid piano ballads about serial killers, retro grooves on the collapse of civilised society and stirring power ballads declaring that "*C***s are still running the world*", *Jarvis* was an acerbic take on the classic showman solo debut.

478 ALASTAIR GALBRAITH CRY

EMPEROR JONES, 2000

Drones, arpeggios, sonic warps and manipulated guitars created hypnotic and meditative four-track soundscapes on the New Zealand sound sculptor's fifth solo album, the unsettling tones deepened by occasional whisper-in-the-night vocals.

477 CATS IN PARIS COURTCASE 2000

AKOUSTIK ANARKHY, 2008

An ever-shifting conceit, the debut from Manchester's Cats In Paris was a debut album built on the keystones of math rock, avant electronica, twee pop, prog and 8-bit gaming soundtracks, the band deconstructing and reconstructing each song by the minute. "*It works every time*", went "Foxes". Well, a good 80 per cent.

474 MAJOR PARKINSON MAJOR PARKINSON

DEGATON, 2008

A kind of Norwegian Electric Six, Major Parkinson merged cabaret, prog, indie pop and hardcore rock on their celebrated debut, characterised by singer Jon Ivar Kollbotn's cranky theatrics and wildly surreal lyrics circling the topics of bicycles, strange discotheques and drunk sex.

473 BRENDAN BENSON LAPALCO

STARTIME INTERNATIONAL, 2002

Before joining Jack White in The Raconteurs, Benson was Detroit's greatest proponent of sunny, folk-infused West Coast guitar pop and second album *Lapalco* his finest hour. "Tiny Spark" and "Folk Singer", particularly, were convertible-friendly wonders.

470 PLUSH FED

AFTER HOURS, 2002

Only available in Japan for much of the decade, Liam Hayes' second Plush record further lived up to the name, draping his sophisticated slow-burn balladry in Bacharach-style strings and the ballroom elegance of '60s Scott Walker.

469 BARK PSYCHOSIS CODENAME: DUSTSUCKER

FIRE, 2004

Five years in the making and effectively a Graham Sutton solo project (abetted by Talk Talk's Lee Harris and Dual's Colin Bradley, among others), the second and final BP album drifted by with little regard for traditional form but plenty for rich sonic grace and bursts of dark metallic noise.

466 VOICE OF THE SEVEN WOODS VOICE OF THE SEVEN WOODS

TWISTED NERVE, 2007

VOTSW was the first moniker of Rick Tomlinson (not that one) and a vehicle for the Northern guitar master's phenomenal acoustic work, where psychedelic folk met Middle Eastern textures, tropicália and even touches of Faust.

465 THE HIDDEN CAMERAS THE SMELL OF OUR OWN

ROUGH TRADE, 2003

Golden showers, marriage bans, blood oaths and thinly veiled oral sex metaphors are given crashing lo-fi orchestral treatments and drenched in chamber-pop romance on a striking debut from Joel Gibb's self-styled "gay church folk music" outfit.

462 BRIAN ENO ANOTHER DAY ON EARTH

HANNIBAL, 2005

Eno returns to the conventional song format for the first time since *Another Green World*. There's little else conventional about it though: "This" experiments with computer-generated lyrics, and the whisper ballad "And Then So Clear" with gender-morphing vocal technology.

461 KEVIN AYERS THE UNFAIRGROUND

LO-MAX, 2007

Roxy Music, Neutral Milk Hotel, Teenage Fanclub and his old Soft Machine mucker Robert Wyatt were among the notables mustered for Ayers' first album in 15 years. The record is all Ayers though – his dense baritone delivering songs of loss and ageing with poignancy and wit.

460 LUPE FIASCO
THE COOL 1ST & 15TH/ ATLANTIC, 2007

Influenced by the deaths of family and friends, and containing a mini-concept following The Streets and The Game – two superhuman personifications of Chicago street life, raising the boy from 2006's "He Say She Say" – Fiasco's second took on a classically slick tone thanks to its '70s symphonic soul samples and honeyed raps.

459 TO ROCOCO ROT & I-SOUND
MUSIC IS A HUNGRY GHOST MUTE/ CITY SLANG, 2001

The German post-rockers and New York turntablist conspire over dank ambient swirls, hypnotic grooves and string-laden, Tortoise-adjacent dream rock. Emotional subtlety rubs up against askew sounds and glitches, to absorbing effect.

456 THE RADIO DEPT
LESSER MATTERS

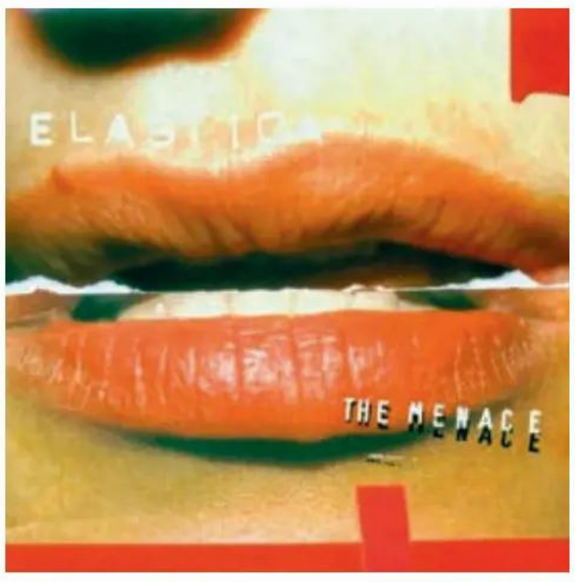
LABRADOR, 2003

The second wave of shoegaze gathers ether. This debut from the Swedish dream poppers paid homage to the classic indiepop of Orange Juice as much as shoegaze originators like MBV, but ultimately sounded like fresh light emanating from the grimy stained glass of the sonic cathedral.

455 LEMON JELLY
LEMONJELLY.KY

IMPOTENT FURY, 2000

Before "Nice Weather For Ducks", the London electronic duo compiled their first three EPs into a lustrous chillout hour. "In The Bath" was suitably bubbly, "Homage To Patagonia" reshaped the *Mission: Impossible* theme as a gentle rhumba and "His Majesty King Raam" could have been produced by Walt Disney.



452 ELASTICA
THE MENACE

DECEPTIVE, 2000

Following a drug-fuelled dissolution, and five long years after their dazzling debut, a new-look Elastica knocked out a dense, chaotic follow-up in weeks, aided by Mark E Smith on "How He Wrote Elastica Man" and indebted more to his art-punk ideals than the Wire-nobbled hooks of their hits.

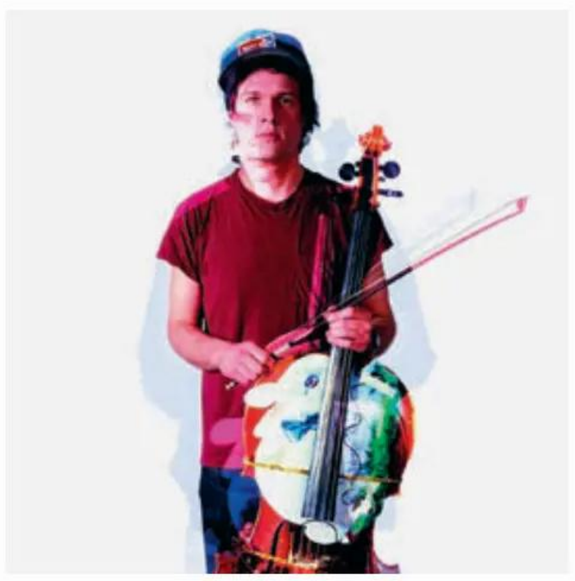
451 NINE HORSES
SNOW BORNE SORROW

SAMADHI SOUND, 2005

War outside, crisis within: David Sylvian, Steve Jansen and German electro-jazzer Burnt Friedman combine to craft a smoother-on-the-ears sister-piece to Sylvian's *Blemish*. Slow, sad and calmly inventive, here are trip-hop torch songs, gorgeous glitch ballads and sensitive personal exposures.

448 THE ARCHIE BRONSON OUTFIT
FUR DOMINO, 2004

On their debut the Somerset trio played a timeless alternative rock, a Swervedriver-like offering that suggested you really had to see them live. Produced by The Kills' Jamie Hince, a basic frazzled noise is their strongest suit, but the songs are self-aware enough not to outstay their welcome.



447 ARTHUR RUSSELL
CALLING OUT OF CONTEXT ROUGH TRADE/ AUDIKA, 2004

Rough Trade's Geoff Travis had released records by Arthur Russell, and he continued to make sense of his archive after the avant-disco genius died. Here: lo-fi chorales, trumpet disco, and countless novel ways to bring self-expression to the dancefloor.

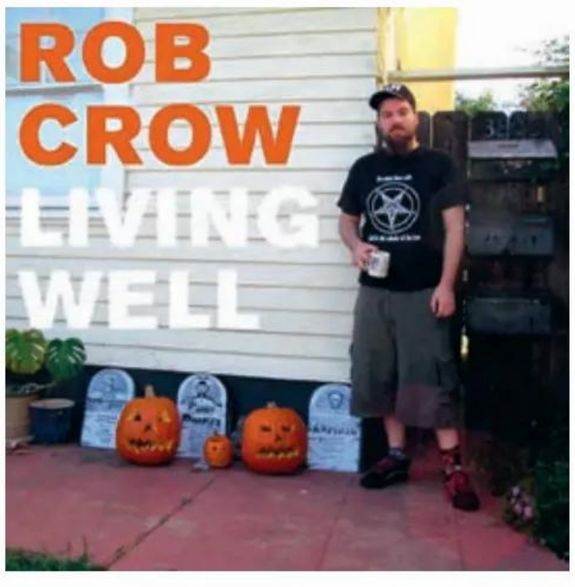
444 MIDLAKE
THE TRIALS OF VAN OCCUPANTHER

BELLA UNION, 2006

Few bands helped define the mood of 21st-century Americana quite as well as Tim Smith's Texan five-piece. And no song quite so well as "Roscoe", the yearning, infinitely listenable opener of their second album. Beyond it: vaguely rural reverie, in which indie rock is governed by the seasons.

443 GHOSTFACE KILLAH
SUPREME CLIENTELE EPIC, 2000

Mighty healthy! Four years since the splendid *Iron Man* – in any sensible person's top three Wu albums – Ghost returned with his signature profusion of image and emotion. So began a decade of prolific form with some significant peaks like *Fishscale* (2006) just over the horizon.



458 ROB CROW LIVING WELL

TEMPORARY RESIDENCE LTD, 2007

Between copious works with acts including Pinback, Thingy and – oh yes – Goblin Cock, the San Diego polymath reached a solo peak with this sparse, lo-fi guitar-pop collection recorded entirely solo. A spiritual successor to Elliott Smith, arguably.

457 MANIC STREET PREACHERS LIFEBLOOD

SONY, 2004

Described by Nicky Wire as "elegiac pop", the Manics' seventh upped the synth-pop for a glossy and reflective record haunted by ghosts: Emily Pankhurst, Richey Edwards, the young punks they once were.

454 THE TWILIGHT SINGERS BLACKBERRY BELLE

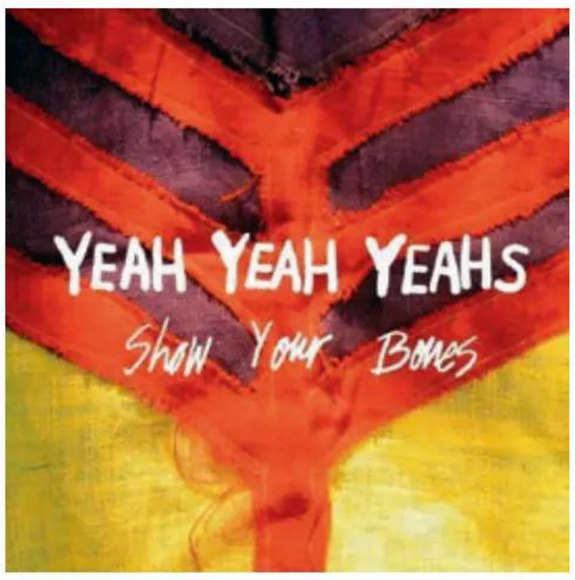
ONE LITTLE INDIAN, 2003

After several false starts and one remixed demo album, Greg Dulli's dark-hearted Afghan Whigs spin-off finally reached its full potential. Chunks of the Whigs' soulful power survived, alongside crepuscular grooves, frail balladry and Mark Lanegan's dolorous turn on "Number Nine".

453 BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN WE SHALL OVERCOME: THE SEEGER SESSIONS

COLUMBIA, 2006

Kicking back at Colts Neck farm, Springsteen and the Sessions Band reinvigorated 13 Seeger-favoured songs – outlaw folk, activist anthems, Irish war ballads – with plenty of heel-clicking swing, brass-led exuberance and *Nebraska*-level poignancy.



450 YEAH YEAH YEAHS SHOW YOUR BONES

INTERSCOPE, 2006

Which way for a band whose debut had been loaded with at least one generational anthem and sold a million? The YYY advanced undaunted, by force of personality. Nick Zinner's guitar abstractions were no less furious, while Karen O's vocals successfully located the tunes amid the chaos.

449 DIRTY PROJECTORS RISE ABOVE

DEAD OCEANS, 2007

Clever idea, maybe too clever: take an album you think you know well and re-record your own interpretation with no further investigation. In David Longstreth's memory, the full-tilt *Damaged* by Black Flag from 1981 is a sophisticated piece of Prince-fronted chamber world pop.

446 ROOTS MANUVA AWFULLY DEEP

BIG DADA, 2005

After contending with his cheese on toast, British MC Roots Manuva was well equipped to confidently branch out. From gritty digital business to lusher productions winking to the 2 Tone era, the title track alone showed how Roots could hold his own amid younger grime performers.

445 COLDPLAY VIVA LA VIDA OR DEATH AND ALL OF HIS FRIENDS

PARLOPHONE, 2008

Hugely successful guitar band: a nice straitjacket to be in. Assisted by production from Brian Eno and electronica artist Jon Hopkins, Chris Martin contrived to spring the band from their gilded cage while growing their sound and emotional impact even further.

442 NEIL YOUNG SILVER AND GOLD

REPRISE, 2000

Quiet following an impressive Crazy Horse storm, Neil's first of the new decade established the nostalgic mode which would be a theme of the 21st century which included political noise, Americana drama and the eventual release of the long-discussed *Archives* project. Undemanding and affectionate.

441 FUSHITSUSHA I SAW IT! THAT WHICH BEFORE I COULD ONLY SENSE

PARATACTILE, 2000

Keiji Haino led the Japanese improvisers into the new decade with this epic double-CD firestorm. Moments of misty calm are available, but generally set the scene for the band's jump scare into the howling reverb of a psychedelic whiteout.

440 BONNIE "PRINCE" BILLY SINGS GREATEST PALACE MUSIC DRAG CITY, 2004

A re-recording of some of the best songs Will Oldham had written in his "Palace" alias, but in fuller and more sumptuous "country" arrangements. Not quite the Nashville makeover some thought then, but a way to hear something in a new and equally beautiful way.

439 STATE RIVER WIDENING COTTONHEAD

VERTICAL FORM, 2004

"Post-rock" sounded like an amusing concept to some – but for the likes of this London trio, the idea was liberating. This second album found them in a spacious landscape and filling it with jazzy and mournful panoramic sounds.

436 FOUR TET ROUNDS DOMINO, 2003

After an apprenticeship in longform electronica, Kieran Hebden's third saw him embracing the new phase of home recording: opening new sonic worlds without leaving his flat. "She Moves She" is your earworm, but the album transcends its breakbeats to roll with something of the ebb and flow of improvised music.

435 MISSY ELLIOTT MISS E...SO ADDICTIVE THE GOLDMIND INC/ELEKTRA, 2001

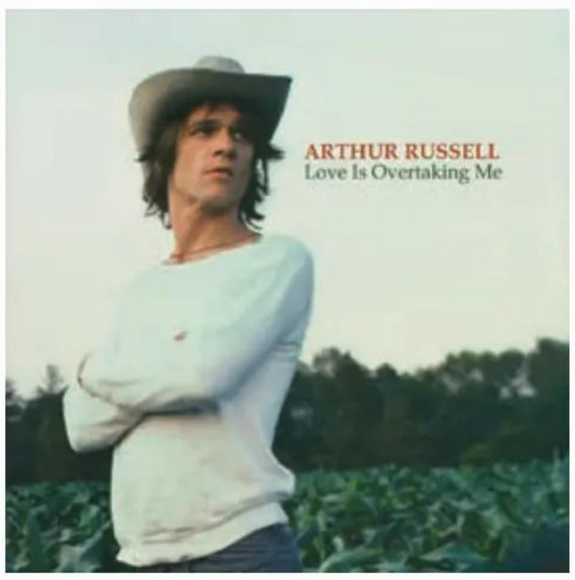
The then-obligatory bhangra beats of the all-conquering "Get UR Freak On" has maybe given us an odd idea of its parent album. A slow builder filled with street observation, party anthems and sex tips, all the guest artists could suggest it's a romp; actually, it's a highly structured trip.

432 HATCHBACK COLORS OF THE SUN LO RECORDINGS, 2008

A couple of years before the *Drive* soundtrack gave the moment a dark aesthetic, Samuel Grawe was diving into an early-1980s synth soundworld. *Colours Of The Sun* and its tasteful keyboard sets off from a base in Tangerine Dream, only occasionally veering down some cheesy lite-house alleyways.

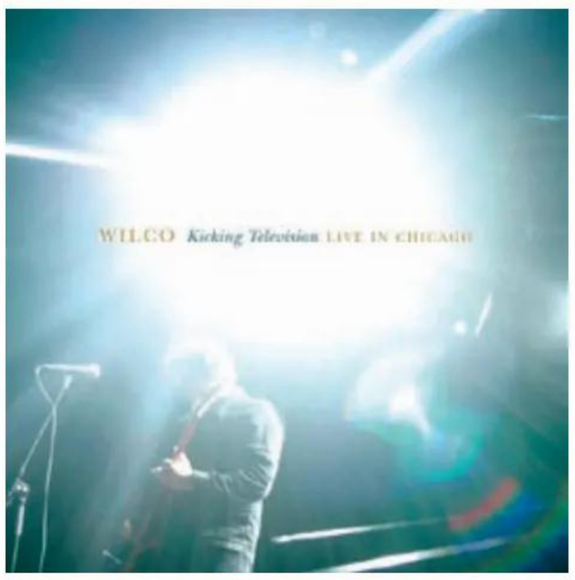
431 THE RAKES CAPTURE/RELEASE V2, 2005

An indie-rock band of the classic formation, The Rakes and their debut made a virtue of its foreshortened horizons. Work, eat, sleep, repeat – the humdrum life of the young employee were all approached with the same tight but resourceful guitar strategies, and enhanced via the characterful delivery of singer Alan Donohoe.



428 ARTHUR RUSSELL LOVE IS OVERTAKING ME ROUGH TRADE/AUDIKA, 2009

In Arthur Russell's talent there were many mansions. The archival work built some momentum here, uncovering the acoustic guitar missing link between the Gene Clark and Elliott Smith you didn't know, alongside the avant-pop maverick you already did.



427 WILCO KICKING TELEVISION: LIVE IN CHICAGO NONESUCH, 2005

Presenting a new lineup (jazz texturalist Nels Cline; multi-instrumentalist Pat Sansone), Wilco confidently pounded the hell out of their recent highlights in front of a boisterous hometown theatre crowd. Preaching to the converted perhaps, but with an irresistible fervour.

424 ELLIOTT SMITH FROM A BASEMENT ON A HILL

ANTI-/DOMINO, 2004

This album returned Smith, albeit posthumously, to the indie label he should probably never have left. An exceptional collection of salvaged work from a planned double album, showing the White Album/*Sister Lovers* meltdown of Smith's last compositions. Power pop with actual power.

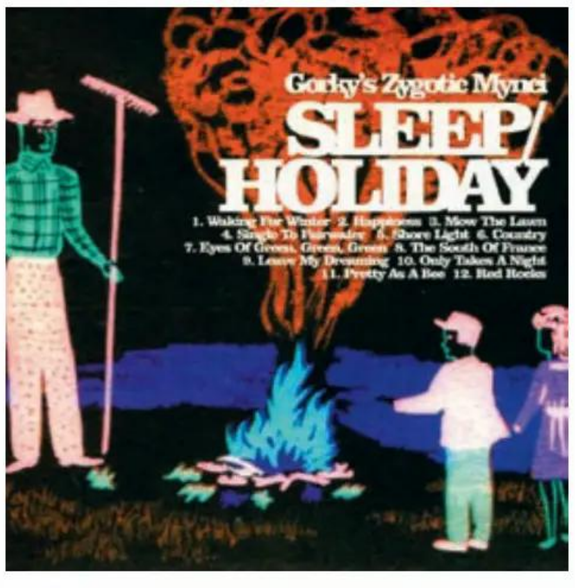
423 SLOBBERBONE EVERYTHING YOU THOUGHT WAS RIGHT WAS WRONG TODAY NEW WEST, 2000

It's hard to say if the lifestyle begets the shambolic alt-country-punk band or vice versa. This rowdy but partially lucid third, recorded at Ardent in Memphis, benefits from some sensitive interventions from Jim Dickinson. Going places – even if it's downward.

438 THE LIBERTINES UP THE BRACKET

ROUGH TRADE, 2002

Perceived initially as a British Strokes, that rather did a disservice to the chaotic and chronically unstable Libertines. This recording captures Pete Doherty and Carl Barât's pungent originality but it was often unclear if they wanted to skip the major poetic statement and proceed directly to the death in the garret.



437 GORKY'S ZYGOTIC MYNCI SLEEP/HOLIDAY

SANCTUARY, 2003

The world rooted for Gorky's to succeed and strike a blow for superbly melodic folky pop in the heart of commercial darkness. It didn't quite pan out that way, but this from their brief major-label spell showed how Euros Childs and co were completely undiminished by the engagement.

434 JESCA HOOP HUNTING MY DRESS INDIE EUROPE, 2009

A strong second album from the artist who was once babysitter for Tom Waits' kids. What happens when a Californian moves to the rainy north-west of England? An album of quirky avant-folk and a duet with Elbow's Guy Garvey, of course.

433 RYAN ADAMS GOLD LOST HIGHWAY, 2001

Ryan Adams' own reputation has tarnished somewhat in the last 20 years – that of his second LP has not. Wedging himself into a lineage of classic American music via both songs (sonically it's "Nickleback play Upstate New York 1966-7") and personnel (Benmont Tench, Jim Keltner), Adams came up with the heartland goods.

430 THE KINGSBURY MANX THE KINGSBURY MANX OVERCOAT RECORDINGS, 2000

From North Carolina, US Capital of Indie Rock, the Manx today sound like an Americana band with post-rock tendencies. Acoustic guitar and steel are in place – but they put some space between them, so they can be heard for their own beauty. Hard to find today, but worth it.

429 FUCK BUTTONS TAROT SPORT

ATP RECORDINGS, 2009

William Hung and Ben Power lived on the cusp between the toybox and noise, a location which brought them wider attention round this second album. Danceable synthgaze. Noddable power electronics. Theirs was a select appeal, but an impressive digital racket.

426 VARIOUS ARTISTS IMPROVISED MUSIC FROM JAPAN

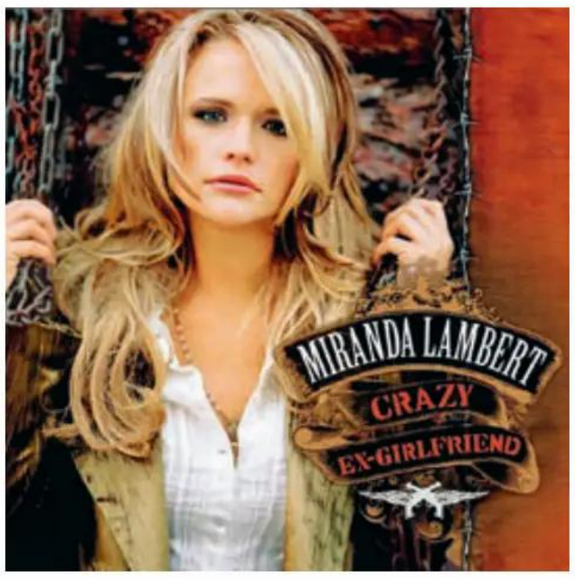
IMJ, 2001

10CD set forming a snapshot of the Japanese scene as it lay at the turn of the century. Hypnotism via bowed cymbals and bells, itchy electronics – and also some explosive acoustic improvisations (Ryoji Hojito). An intense flavour of a fleeting moment.

425 GLASVEGAS GLASVEGAS

COLUMBIA, 2008

Highly strung and with an urge to confess, Glasvegas's debut is the sound of a band painting their feelings on a major-label budget. They shoot for JAMC do Phil Spector's wall of sound and generally miss, but the overwrought charms of "Geraldine" made for music of some ambition.



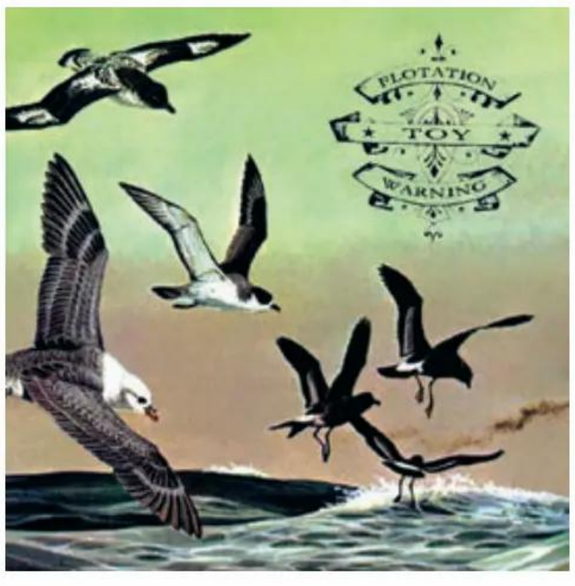
422 MARINA LAMBERT CRAZY EX-GIRLFRIEND COLUMBIA NASHVILLE, 2007

Her second major-label album has a familiar dynamic – small-town gossip/escape, strong drink and firearms, ballad track 4 – but the knowing winks to country cliches and fixer-upper Stonesy rock suggest how the wind might have been changing in Nashville.

421 PARAMORE BRAND NEW EYES

FUELED BY RAMEN, 2009

Paramore is the band but it's all Hayley Williams' show here. The full-tilt brickwalled emo pop of the Tennesseans third might be a bit unyielding if you're old enough to vote, but when you're more familiar with the territory the likes of "Playing God" signal a merging of streams to form one pop wave. Mates with Taylor Swift, you know.

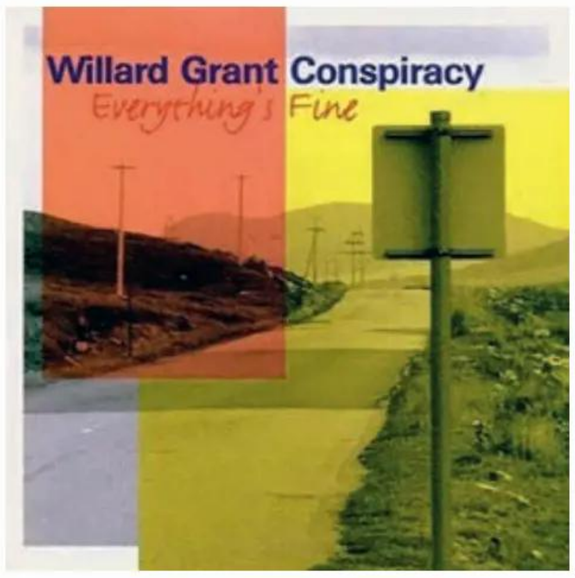


420 FLOTATION TOY WARNING
BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO THE FLIGHT DECK
POINTY/MISRA/TALITRES, 2004

Flotation Toy Warning occupied a space between Mercury Rev and The Divine Comedy – quirky and literate pop, attempted on an epic scale. This debut album found Paul Carter's London band flirting with a rotating bow tie novelty pop, but just about pulling it off.

419 THE BLITHE SONS
WAVES OF GRASS
JEWELLED ANTLER, 2001

At the turn of the 2000s, the (West Coast) Jewelled Antler collective moved music outside, creating drone-based music rooted, sometimes literally, in the earth. This Loren Chasse project takes Pauline Oliveros's accordion and runs with it, placing organic drones and nature sounds side by side.

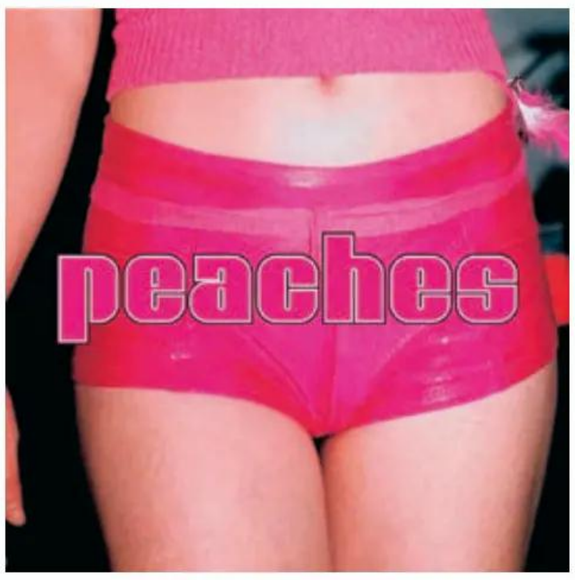


416 WILLARD GRANT CONSPIRACY
EVERYTHING'S FINE
SLOW RIVER, 2000

Robert Fisher's band sounded up for new challenges at the start of the new century. Sure, the location was familiar: blue collar, penurious, a relationship cracking under pressure, but the instrumentation nodded to a resourceful countrified pop. Were things looking up?

415 CORTNEY TIDWELL
DON'T LET STARS KEEP US TANGLED UP
EVER, 2006

Nashville born and raised, Cortney Tidwell didn't make a debut that was Nashville chained. From a starting point in leftfield folky pop, *Don't Let Stars*... accessed a palette of synthetic sounds to extend her songs in surprising ways. The apple fell some distance from the tree.

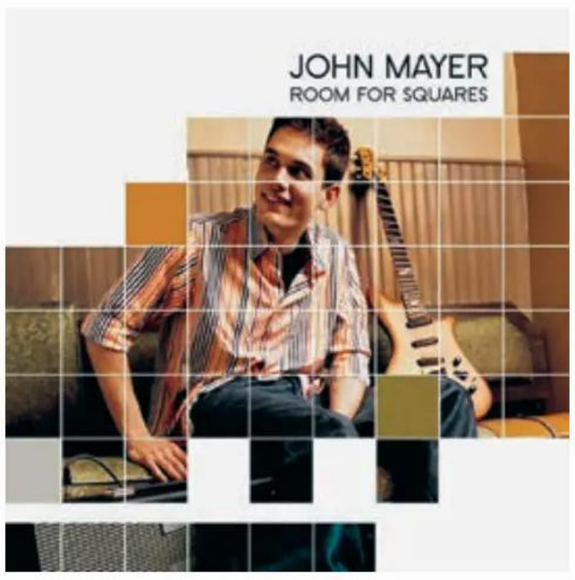


412 PEACHES
THE TEACHES OF PEACHES
KITTY-YO/XL, 2000

Peaches, aka Canadian musician Merrill Nisker, was the electroclash scene's Iggy Pop: blowing the doors off the new century by taking ownership of the sexual dynamic of the rock show. "Fuck The Pain Away" you know – there's more lo-fi polemical electronica to learn from.

411 ROY HARPER
THE GREEN MAN
SCIENCE FRICTION, 2000

There were a good 20 years of tough times and small community theatres for British folkies like Roy Harper. *The Green Man* restores the singer/guitarist to something like the free-roaming sound of his reverberating *Stormcock* majesty, some spooky vocal layering serving to sweeten the weird/bitter pill of his words.



408 JOHN MAYER
ROOM FOR SQUARES
AWARE/COLUMBIA, 2001

A guitar guy by nature, Mayer played down his chops and played up the cheeky smile for this slow-burning debut. Husky-voiced and unashamedly bedroom-based, the likes of "Your Body Is A Wonderland" showed the remarkable public appetite for 15-certificate post-Coldplay soft rock.

407 DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE
NARROW STAIRS
ATLANTIC, 2008

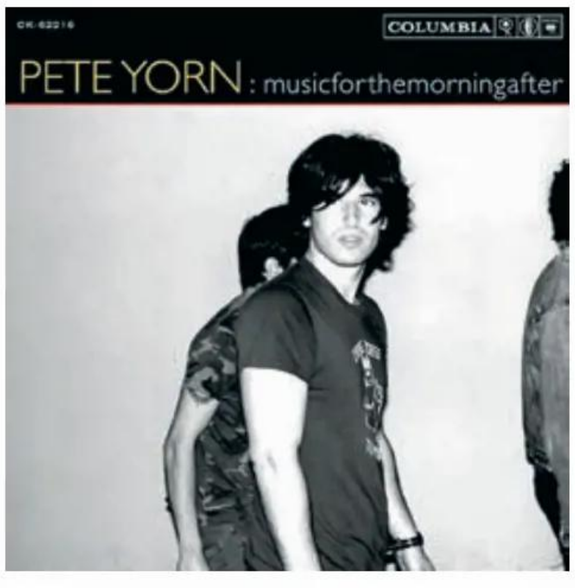
The second DCFC album finds them fleshing out Ben Gibbard's prolix indie-rock tunes on a major-label budget. The voice is still sweet but the passing years have helped create a critical vocabulary for songs like "I Will Possess Your Heart". Namely: "a slightly weird Incel vibe".

404 ADAM GREEN
FRIENDS OF MINE
ROUGH TRADE, 2003

What happens when you take the lad out of The Moldy Peaches? You reveal a fine baritone and this deeply weird but rather beautiful album. Opens with one of the most impressive uses of the c-bomb the 21st century will ever manage, and includes a harsh critique of the pop artist Jessica Simpson.

403 FOUNTAINS OF WAYNE
TRAFFIC AND WEATHER VIRGIN, 2007

An artefact from a time when successful US pop was often played for laughs. Exhibit a: this fourth album from the New Jersey popsters, a kind of Wings to Ben Folds' Elton. The glossy production and crudely drawn social reportage plays less well today but the tunes are undeniable.



418 PETE YORN MUSICFORTHE-MORNINGAFTER

COLUMBIA, 2001

Here the well-connected Yorn – his brothers are entertainment industry bigshots – tried on a number of different styles, to see which fit best: indie rock, Pavement-style sideways thinking or Foo Fighters rock. Still affectionately regarded.

417 LLOYD COLE MUSIC IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SANCTUARY, 2003

Cole's sixth album showed the solid, BBC4 nature of his art. On the surface, this was acoustic plain sailing. Delve a little deeper than the tasteful string arrangements, though, and there was drugs, murder and bitter rhetoric. An impressive shifting of gears.

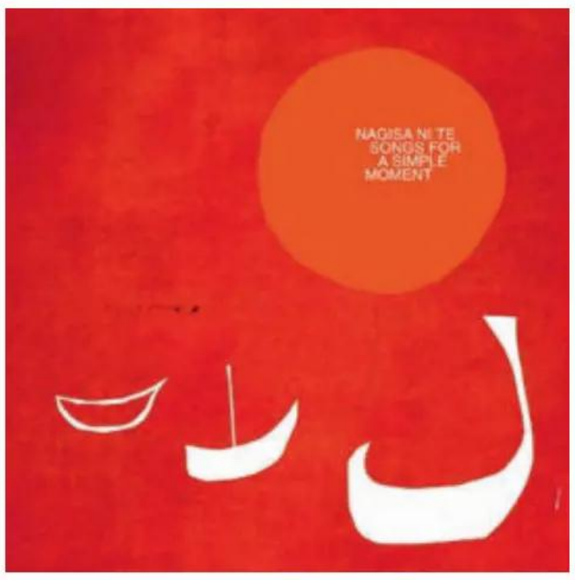
414 NISENNENMONDAI DESTINATION TOKYO SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND, 2009

A band of great focus, Japanese trio Nissennenmondai here proceed with the intensity of machine-gun fire, pausing only to reload. Uncompromising as the band are, though, the likes of "Disco" – ESG do machine reggae – show their uncanny ability to change things up.

413 CAT POWER YOU ARE FREE

MATADOR, 2003

Chan Marshall's superb sixth album was a place where lo-fi rock effortlessly proved its claim to greatness. Storied grunge-era names – Grohl, Vedder – showed up to play, but as the likes of "Speak For Me" proved, Marshall and her exceptional voice were the only things worth hearing.



410 NAGISA NI TE SONGS FOR A SIMPLE MOMENT

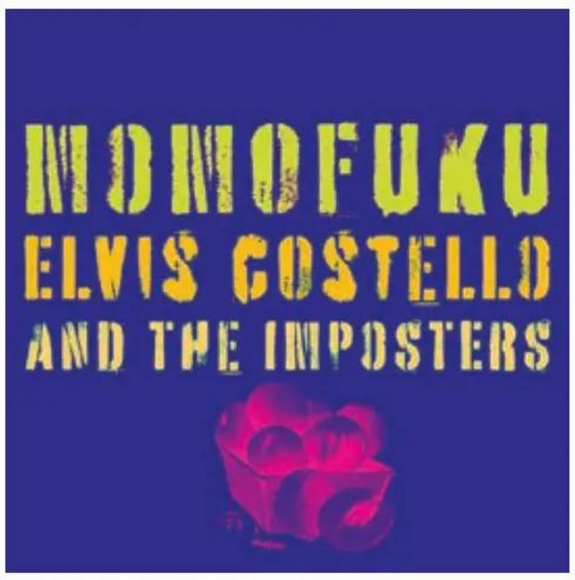
GEOGRAPHIC, 2001

Japanese duo investigate the psychedelic power of simple strumming on this unassuming but quietly engrossing fifth album. Fans of Galaxie 500 could do much worse than hear just how far you can take three chords and a lot of tenderness.

409 CALIFONE ROOTS & CROWNS

THRILL JOCKEY, 2006

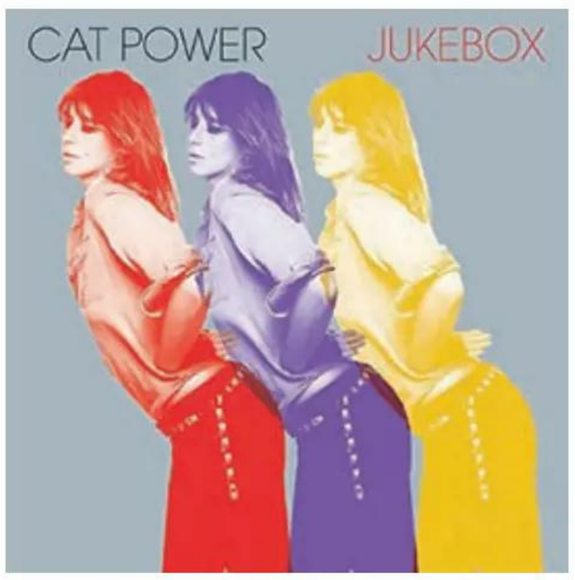
Tim Rutilli was one Sub Pop artist who was never going to make the label's fortune. In a way, it's a great shame: with Red Red Meat or Califone, Rutilli knew the blueprint and dimensions of a weird and interesting record and could conjure them at will. This sixth, all subterranean grooves and muttering is such a one.



406 ELVIS COSTELLO AND THE IMPOSTERS

MOMOFUKU LOST HIGHWAY, 2008

Recorded in eight days, Costello, in fine voice, delivered an enjoyably rowdy piece of work, alive with spark and sonic waywardness. Having mastered his form, he can break it whenever he wants, and here "Turpentine" does that – but his return to classicism also provides delightful moments.



405 CAT POWER JUKEBOX

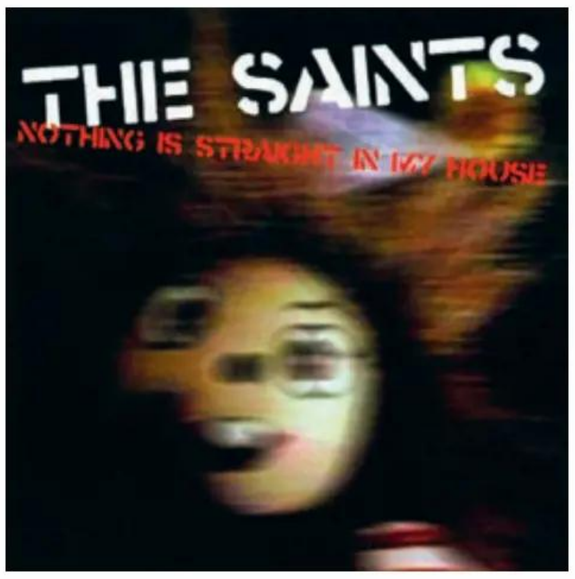
MATADOR, 2008

Covers records were no expression of defeat for Chan Marshall. One of the most expressive voices of her generation, here she and a band of very cool people – from Spooner Oldham to Judah Bauer – inhabited songs by Hank Williams, James Brown and Joni Mitchell as if they had been written as a suite, for her.

402 ELVIS COSTELLO & THE IMPOSTERS

THE DELIVERY MAN LOST HIGHWAY, 2004

A musical polymath, it can be hard for Costello to confine himself and focus. Across weeping country and murky funk, free-associating R&B, and the folk-blues title track, here the unifying factor is intensity – as the Imposters deliver music to quietly stop you in your tracks.



401 THE SAINTS NOTHING IS STRAIGHT IN MY HOUSE CADIZ, 2005

Nearly 30 years after "(I'm) Stranded", The Saints (Chris Bailey edition) were older but not really wiser. Keeping the faith with their hard-swinging and classic rock-adjacent take on witty, high-speed garage blues, the band seem here to be an editor's knife away from a classic.

400 LAURA CANTRELL
NOT THE TREMBLIN' KIND

DIESEL ONLY, 2000

The debut from a major new talent in country, Cantrell's take on the genre was historically reverent but sat neatly among its alt-country peers. There's a definite touch of Freakwater to these gentle but acutely observed melodies.

399 CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG
IRM

BECAUSE/ELEKTRA, 2009

Family helps – Charlotte's the daughter of Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin – but she's got plenty of her own character and charm too, and that's in fine form on *IRM*. Here her stylish electro-pop gets messed up with Beck.

396 LOW
DRUMS AND GUNS

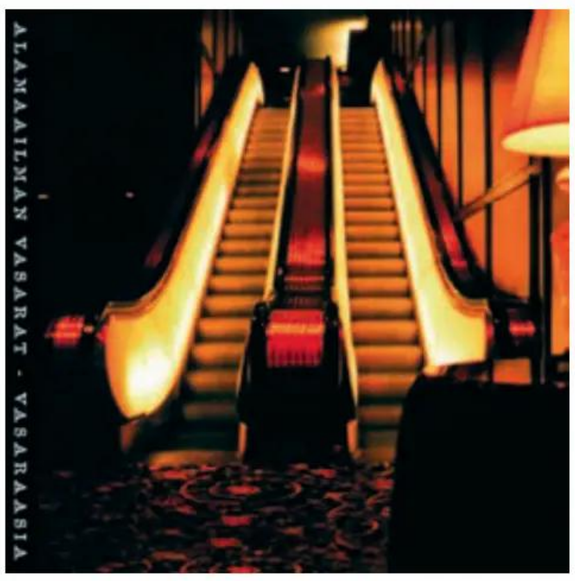
SUB POP, 2007

Some of us never really wanted Low to change: the hushed, post-Galaxie 500 silences of albums like *Long Division* was all we needed. *Drums And Guns* reminds us we were wrong: these wartime songs are stripped back and rich.

395 TILLY AND THE WALL
BOTTOMS OF BARRELS

TEAM LOVE, 2006

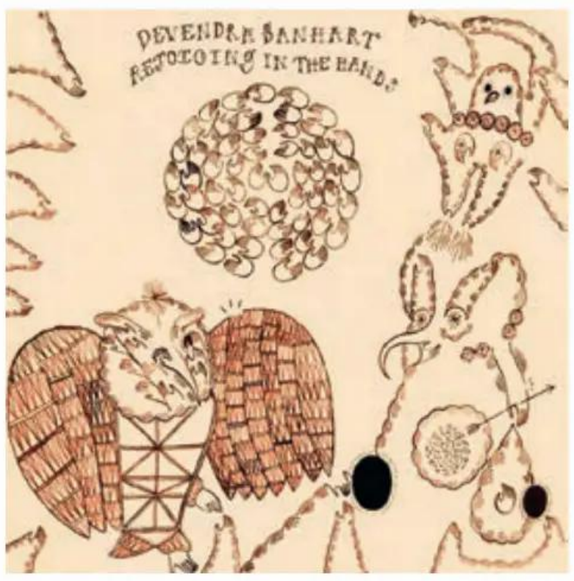
Their connections with Conor Oberst (aka Bright Eyes) are misnomers – Tilly And The Wall are too much fun to get wrapped up in idle navel-gazing. Their second album is a refinement, losing some indie-pop-esque, vital energy but gaining melodic confidence.



392 ALAMAAILMAN VASARAT
VASARAASIA

SILENCE, 2000

Finland's spectacularly good at gifting the world anti-genre weirdos, and Alamaailman Vasarat are part of this long tradition. They're obviously into klezmer and metal – there's an unexpected combination – but there's more to this voracious, hyperactive troupe of uncontrollable, creative minds.



391 DEVENDRA BANHART
REJOICING IN THE HANDS

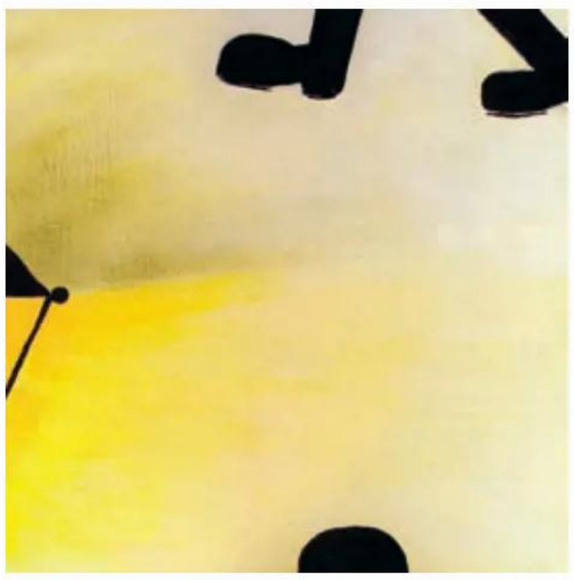
YOUNG GOD, 2004

The tale of this faux-mystic male model turned freak folk singer felt almost too good to be true, and really, it was. His songs had their charms, though: imagine, if you will, hippy-era Marc Bolan fronting a Marc Jacobs collection.

388 GHOSTFACE KILLAH
FISHSCALE

DEF JAM, 2006

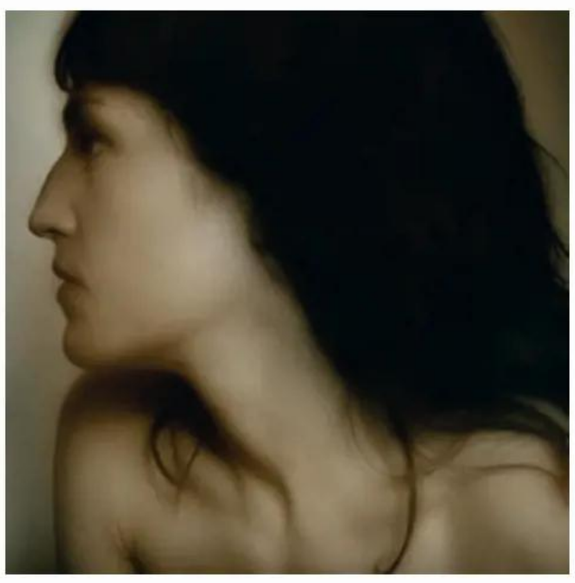
Ghostface was back on his best form with *Fishscale* after temporarily drifting. This Wu-Tang member is also one of the clan's most dependable, and hooked up with some great producers – Just Blaze, J Dilla, MF Doom – *Fishscale* is near perfect.



387 KEITH ROWE & JOHN TILBURY
DUOS FOR DORIS

ERSTWHILE, 2003

Two legends of improvised music, perhaps best known as long-time members of AMM, play together to pay tribute to Tilbury's mother, who had recently died. It's not mournful so much as elegiac, delicate and sensitive: two masters, best form.



384 JOAN AS POLICE WOMAN
TO SURVIVE

REVEAL, 2008

To Survive has Joan Wasser singing heavy reality (the death of her mother from cancer) with real emotional heft. These lilting pop-rock songs are beautifully rendered, with soul-etched, quietly thoughtful arrangements.

383 RALFE BAND
SWORDS

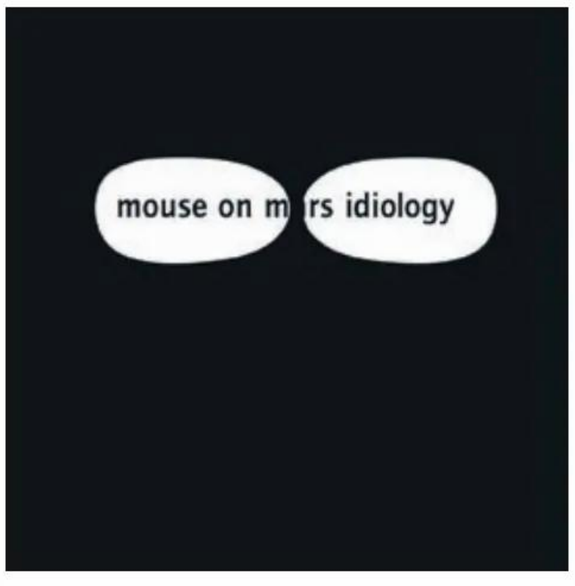
SKINT, 2005

The songs on *Swords* have drunken swagger, their strangeness barely kept in check by the stumbling but charming performances. Oly Ralfe's a great writer who's able to pull from Britain's great eccentric past – Barrett, Ayers, Wyatt – without getting too wacky.

398 LES SAVY FAV INCHES

FRENCHKISS, 2004

A good taster for the manner of these idiosyncratic live favourites, *Inches* pulls together singles from the group's early history, where their sound was still clearly in formation, and their freak flag was still firmly flying. Weird, whipsmart songs of uncommon art-punk intensity.



397 MOUSE ON MARS IDIOLOGY

DOMINO, 2001

A wild, wide-ranging set from this German electronica duo, taking in Canterbury-esque prog touches, slippery two-step skips, raging drill'n'bass, and folkloric melodies. Deep in there, though, is a mutant pop sensibility that sets them well apart from the pro-forma pack.

394 LIFE WITHOUT BUILDINGS ANY OTHER CITY

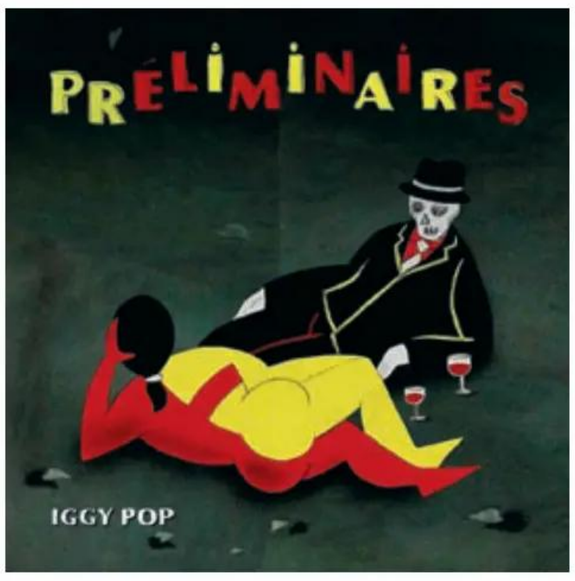
TUGBOAT, 2001

Their only album, and what an album it is. Life Without Buildings were intelligent enough to borrow the best things from post-punk – scratchiness, disjoint, criticality – and build this into new and unexpected shapes. Part of Scotland's great, inspired DIY tradition.

393 THE STILLS WITHOUT FEATHERS

VICE, 2006

This Canadian indie-rock gang give it their all with their second album. Earlier material was heavy on Bunnymen moods – clearly drama and moroseness was the order of the day – but *Without Feathers* is lighter, brighter, not as self-involved.



390 IGGY POP PRÉLIMINAIRES

EMI, 2009

By 2009, Iggy Pop had surely earned the right to do whatever the hell he wanted. Still *Préliminaires* confused some die-hard Stoogemaniacs: what is this, frou-frou French pop? But Iggy can assuredly do pop; here, with jazz flourishes, he croons beautifully.

389 MASTODON LEVIATHAN

RELAPSE, 2004

While not as unremittingly heavy as its predecessor, *Remission*, Mastodon's second album still packs plenty of punches. When highlighted, its complexity works to its favour, and when this is dialled back, well, they're simply a great, lumbering sludge-metal beast.

386 THE RACONTEURS CONSOLERS OF THE LONELY

WARNER BROS, 2008

If you're going to be a super-group, you'd better make sure the super is convincing. Raconteurs are inches away from such a title, with Jack White and Brendan Benson in cahoots, but this grab-bag of great rock'n'roll is blasted fun.

385 JIM BRYSON WHERE THE BUNGALOWS ROAM

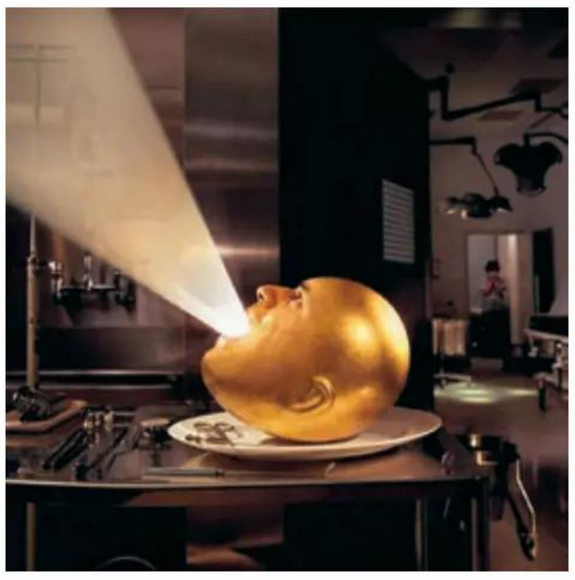
KELP, 2007

An unfairly overlooked Canadian singer-songwriter, Jim Bryson's worked with the likes of Howe Gelb from Giant Sand, and Kathleen Edwards. It's a good hint at where Bryson's at – stylish, elegant country and folk rock, rich with intelligence and poetry.

382 BOMBAY BICYCLE CLUB I HAD THE BLUES BUT I SHOOK THEM LOOSE

ISLAND, 2009

It's usually best not to trust bands who get somewhere by winning competitions. But Bombay Bicycle Club have their bona fides – Jamie MacColl's grandparents are folk legends Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger. The indie-rock here has its post-Franz Ferdinand charms.



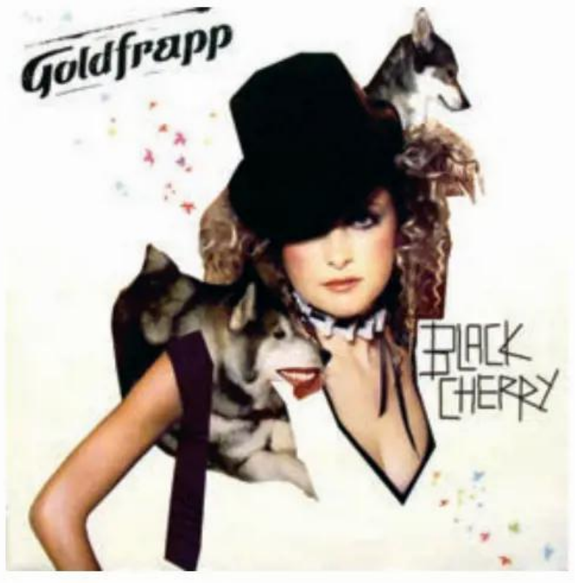
381 THE MARS VOLTA DELOUSED IN THE COMATORIUM

GOLD STANDARD LABORATORIES/ UNIVERSAL, 2003

That's an awful album cover. But Rodríguez-López and Bixler-Zavala sound sharpened here, after At The Drive-In's dissolution, even as they decided to go conceptual with the album's unfocused narrative. There's psych, prog and art-rock in excelsis – a glorious, witty mess.

380 HERBERT
BODILY FUNCTIONS
!K7, 2001

Better known for his spatialised deep house, with *Bodily Functions* Herbert went meta-pop, and meta-jazz, too, while staying true to house's mutant bump. Delicate sampling is – literally – the spine here, songs constructed from body noise, surgery, etc.

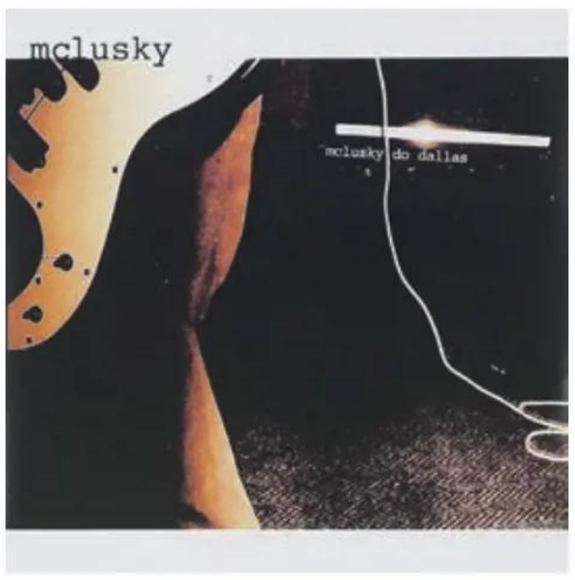


379 GOLDFRAPP
BLACK CHERRY
MUTE, 2003

For some, this will always be Goldfrapp's best, an electro-pop mash-up which nods to its predecessor's lambent torch songs but would rather take you out and get you totally wasted. "Strict Machine"'s shuffle-beat is German techno in an electroclash jumpsuit.

376 TY SEGALL AND MIKAL CRONIN
REVERSE SHARK ATTACK
KILL SHAMAN, 2009

What a heavyweight garage-pop duo. Segall had already recorded several great, supercharged albums, and Cronin was part of his touring band; *Reverse Shark Attack* plays to their collective strengths, while getting deeply weird at times. Ratty, thrillingly inventive, home-baked magic.



375 McLUSKY
McLUSKY DO DALLAS
TOO PURE, 2002

Sadly not *Dallas* the TV show, though yes, a reference to Debbie's titular porn film. The inevitable Pixies comparisons that McLusky received at the time feel way too reductive; they're cannier, with much deeper connections to hardcore than American post-punk.

372 DAVID SYLVIAN
BLEMISH
SAMADHISOUND, 2003

Sylvian's great poetic disarmament really starts here, with songs that dissolve on the tip of his tongue, and arrangements that aren't sparse so much as evacuated. Contributions from improviser Derek Bailey and laptop wiz Fennesz flesh out these bleached bones.

371 KINGS OF LEON
YOUTH AND YOUNG MANHOOD
RCA, 2003

Album number one from these leonine kings – it's all in the hair – and here they're closer to their original roots in blasted Southern and country rock, without the amped-up poseur mentality that got in the way of later sets.

368 OKKERVIL RIVER
THE STAGE NAMES
JAGJAGUWAR, 2007

Will Sheff has one of those warbly, wobbly voices you either love or hate: authenticity, or requiring a voice coach, you be the judge. It's deployed well on *The Stage Names*, weaving around some of his most eloquent indie rock yet.

367 CIRCULUS
THE LICK ON THE TIP OF AN ENVELOPE YET TO BE SENT
RISE ABOVE, 2005

What an unexpected thing to hear in the mid-noughties. Namely: a British folk-rock album that sounds like the Incredible String Band occasionally breaking into amped-up prog anthems with Status Quo chords. It doesn't all work, but at least it's got wild ambition.

364 CAT POWER
THE COVERS RECORD
MATADOR, 2000

Chan Marshall has made a habit of covers albums, which you could read as laziness (given how strong her own songs are). Notwithstanding: it's a smart reimagining of Marshall as a near-peerless interpreter of the Stones, Dylan and Reed. All are rendered – and heard – anew.

363 MAHER SHALAL HASH BAZ
BLUES DU JOUR
GEOGRAPHIC, 2003

Their first full studio set since the remarkable triple album *Return Visit To Rock Mass*; this one's recorded with the support of Scotland's independent pop legends The Pastels. Each song a miniaturised pop revelation, hinging on leader Tori Kudo's wayward vision.

378 COLDPLAY
X&Y
PARLOPHONE, 2005

By now you had two choices: gaze into your navel with Radiohead, or into the stars with Coldplay. Except the latter could, too often, feel remarkably ordinary. But *X&Y* has enough ambition to charm, and a brazen Kraftwerk lift, too.

377 BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
THE RISING
COLUMBIA, 2002

These were not exactly glory days for Brooce, but *The Rising* sees him getting back on form. The whole 'making sense of 9/11' story might feel tired now, but there's more going on here – a sort of subtle textural experiment.

374 QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE
LULLABIES TO PARALYZE
INTERSCOPE, 2005

On album number five, the only Queens left – all terms used advisedly – are Josh Homme and Mark Lanegan. Through the internecine turmoil, it hangs together well, a more ambitious collection of richtering rock songs, aiming straight for the cinematic heart.

373 ANIMAL COLLECTIVE
FEELS
FATCAT, 2005

While they'd recorded a few albums of attention-deficit noise-pop, also nodding to the psycho-acoustics of groups like This Heat, on *Feels* Animal Collective took a great leap forward with a lovely rush of hectic, yet somehow bucolic, avant-pop song forms.

370 JOSE GONZÁLEZ
VENEER
IMPERIAL, 2003

Swedish-Argentinian singer-songwriter González has the kind of gentle, lilting voice that skirts soppiness and self-consciousness, but he's one of the rare few who can deploy it in non-gauche ways. Here, it's in service of Nick Drake-esque acoustic melancholy, quietly pensive.

369 INTERPOL
TURN ON THE BRIGHT LIGHTS
MATADOR, 2002

It's very easy to write Interpol off as Joy Division clones; so easy, in fact, that you miss the other post-punk references they've studiously inserted into their songs (they must be Chameleons fans). Surprise: these 11 songs are curiously sustaining.

366 BRIAN WILSON
SMILE
NONESUCH, 2004

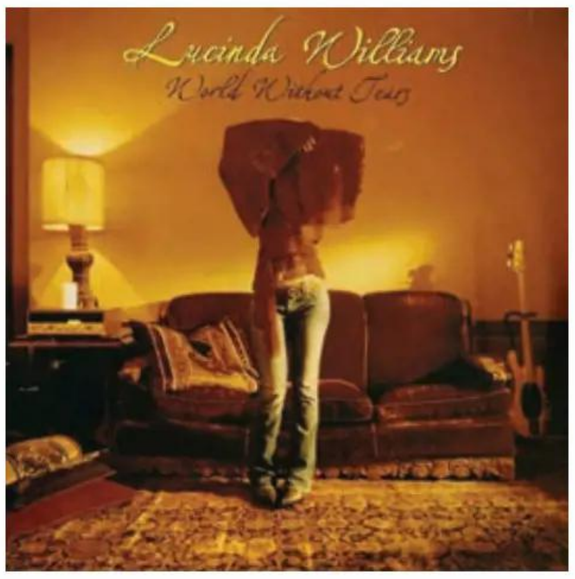
Wilson and Beach Boys fans had been waiting so long for *SMiLE* that Wilson's reconstruction of it could only feel like a minor disappointment. But once you're past that inevitability, this is actually a bravura performance, from a pop statesman.

365 GODSPEED! YOU BLACK EMPEROR
LIFT YOUR SKINNY FISTS LIKE ANTENNAS TO HEAVEN
CONSTELLATION/ KRANKY, 2000

You either love Godspeed's dark drama, or find them hammy, overpreening and pretentious. *Skinny Fists* won't do anything to dissuade either side, but it does suggest an unexpected longevity, and a cussed agit-post-rock vision.

362 THE SOUNDTRACK OF OUR LIVES
BEHIND THE MUSIC
TELEGRAM, 2001

Formed from the ashes of the excellent Union Carbide Productions, this Swedish gang embraced simpler, less angsty pleasures. The psych-rock that's at the heart of *Behind The Music* is sweet and lustrous in its loveliness – and, indeed, its Love-liness.



361 LUCINDA WILLIAMS
WORLD WITHOUT TEARS
LOST HIGHWAY, 2003

There are many, many great Lucinda Williams albums, and this is only one more of them. After the reflective swoon of *Essence*, Williams sounds like she's out on the road, ready to get alive again – damaged, undoubtedly, but still fighting.

360 GUY CLARK SOMEDAYS THE SONG WRITES YOU

DUALTONE, 2009

Given the strength of his first two albums, *Old No 1* and *Texas Cookin'*, it's easy to overlook Clark's subsequent decades-long career. Do so, and it's your loss: *Somedays* is moving, gorgeous, packed with great songs, a mid-career country gem.

359 GARY NUMAN PURE

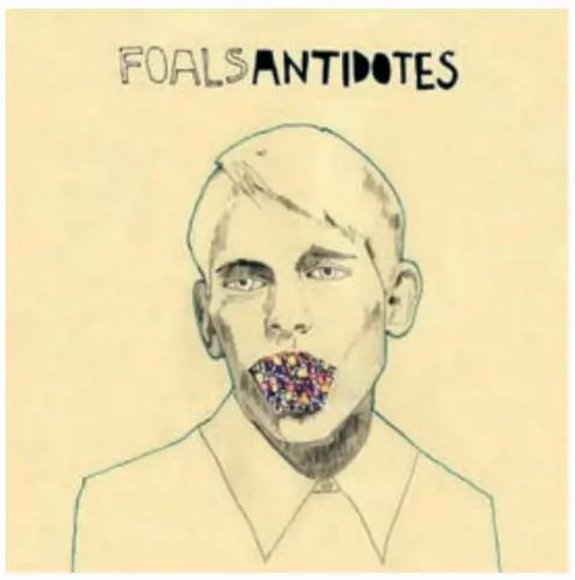
EAGLE, 2000

A curious, of-its-time set from Numan. He might have come through with a serious lust for Bowie, but he was often out ahead of the pack, too. *Pure* has him vibing with Nine Inch Nails in darkhearted, industrial pomp mode.

356 GRAHAM COXON HAPPINESS IN MAGAZINES

TRANSCOPIC/PARLOPHONE, 2004

The weird one from Blur, the guitarist with too many ideas to contain in that bowlcut head, went pop on *Happiness In Magazines*. Or at least his warped idea of what pop could be. After some lo-fi outings, this offered catchy, chiming guitar gems.



355 FOALS ANTIDOTES

TRANSGRESSIVE, 2008

They'd made waves with some early singles, but on *Antidotes*, Foals feel fully formed. They may have been unhappy with the mix – from TV On The Radio's Dave Sitek – but the brittle, intelligent songs still shine through Sitek's unique touch.

352 DUNGEN TIO BITAR

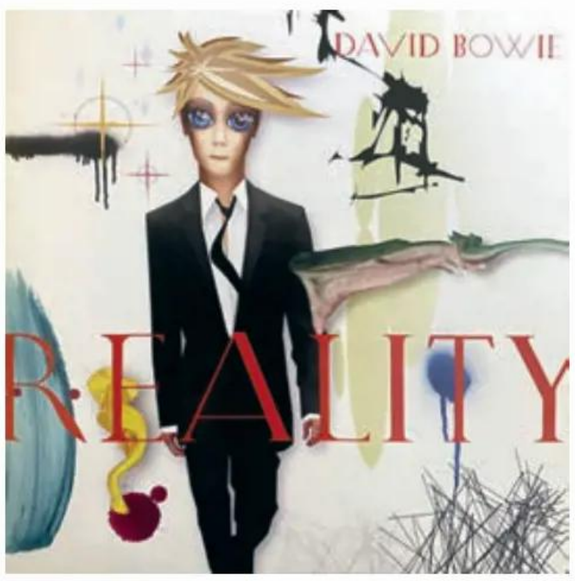
SUBLIMINAL SOUNDS, 2007

Some of the mysterious appeal of Dungen – who were these psych-pop mavericks from deepest Sweden? – had dissipated by the release of *Tio Bitar*. To Dungen's credit, their songs, a kind of chilled-out, lackadaisical psychedelia, were as strong as ever.

351 DAN DEACON SPIDERMAN OF THE RINGS

CARPARK, 2007

Debut set from indietronica icon, though Dan Deacon's take on electro-informed dance music is way more hyper-everything than most laptoppers – hyper-colourful, hyper-hypnotic, hyper-active. It's dumb but not stupid, full of idiot energy, and behind all that, sharply, deftly constructed.



348 DAVID BOWIE REALITY

ISO/COLUMBIA, 2003

Hitting a groove on his second Visconti "reunion" album, Bowie took a rockier path than *Heathen*, confronting post-9/11 nihilism, ageing and the futility of any search for life's meaning. '70s echoes? The Modern Lovers' "Pablo Picasso", and Mike Garson improvising an "Aladdin Sane" solo on "Bring Me The Disco King".

347 DUSTIN O'HALLORAN PIANO SOLOS VOL 2

BELLA UNION, 2006

Released the same year as his soundtrack for Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, Arizona composer O'Halloran's second collection of piano pieces was a subtle and refined affair, brushed with melancholy and after-the-storm quietude.

344 NEW ORDER GET READY

LONDON, 2001

Eight years on from *Republic*, New Order reconvened for the final LP of their original lineup. Melody, drive and classic Hooky basslines trumped dance formula on tracks – "Crystal", "60 Miles An Hour", "Rock The Shack" – that laced the subterranean electronics of their '80s era with dashes of *XTRMNTR*'s post-millennial tech rock.

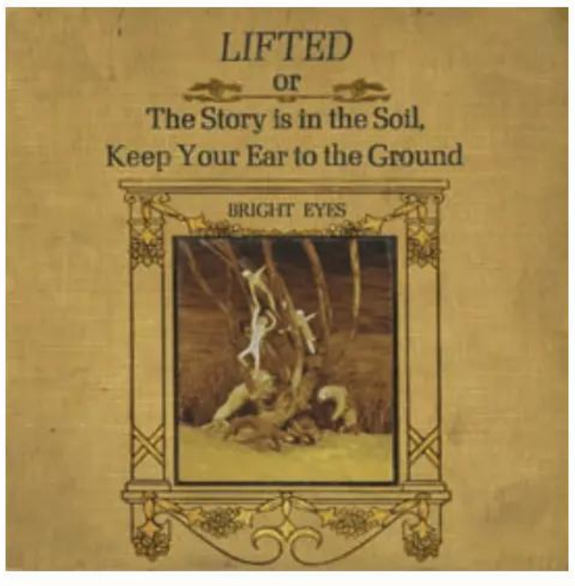
343 CASS McCOMBS DROPPING THE WRIT

DOMINO, 2007

Beyond its jarring, cranky opening gambit "Lionkiller", McComb's third album – his first for Domino – becomes a lovable piece of artful folk rock. Capable of making even the act of cleaning toilets in a Baltimore nightclub (on "That's That") sound like an indie movie meet-cute.

358 MULL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
LOSS
BLANCO Y NEGRO, 2001

Loss is Colin MacIntyre's first album, and you can hear he's trying to figure out what he wants to do with music. The voice is wafer-thin, but the songs are aiming for more than post-Elephant 6 indie-psych-pop. Shaky Brit introversion ahoy.

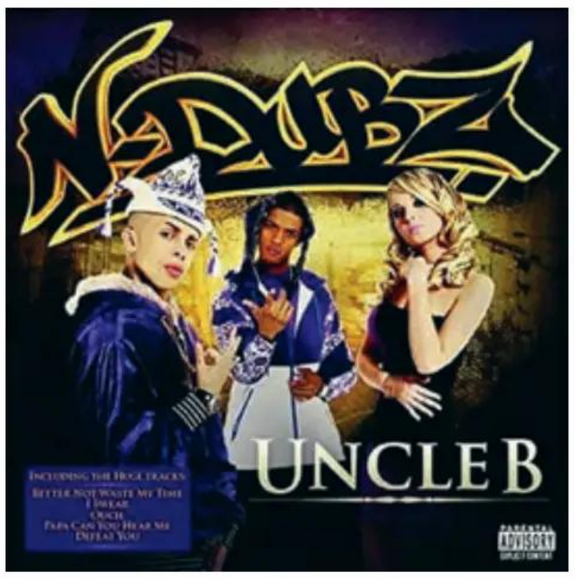


357 BRIGHT EYES
LIFTED OR THE STORY IS IN THE SOIL, KEEP YOUR EAR TO THE GROUND
SADDLE CREEK, 2002

Was Conor Oberst really only 22 years old when *Lifted* was released? It doesn't really have a wisdom beyond its years, but the sheer fact he'd made it this far was something. The lo-fi is long gone; literate emo-folk's the word.

354 MY MORNING JACKET
Z
ATO, 2005

My Morning Jacket seemed to have their thing tightly defined by now – alt-country with some psych and indie-rock flourishes – and *Z* seemed to hone that approach to its apogee, though with some unexpected genre inflections that were coolly surprising.

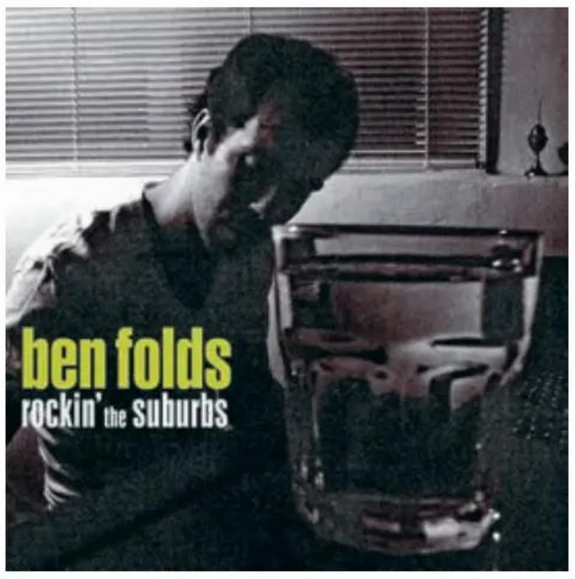


353 N-DUBZ
UNCLE B
ALL AROUND THE WORLD, 2008

The debut N-Dubz album landed to expectations that it couldn't quite live up to. Perhaps it was a bit of a compromise, but it brought a pop edge to grime and hip-hop elements, opening them up to a wide new audience.

350 SUFJAN STEVENS
SEVEN SWANS
SOUNDS FAMILYRE, 2004

Songs of faith and devotion, stripped to spare, mantra-like treatments of banjo, piano, distant drums and angelic indie vocal. Much Biblical matter is discussed, from "Abraham" to the Book Of Revelations allusions in the title track.



349 BEN FOLDS
ROCKIN' THE SUBURBS
EPIC, 2001

The title track was a piece of throwaway nu-metal pastiche, but the rest of Folds' solo debut was sublime stuff indeed: the heartbreaking lay-off ballad "Fred Jones Part 2"; piano pop greats "Zak And Sara", "The Ascent Of Stan" and "Annie Waits"; the simply staggering "Not The Same".

346 TEENAGE FANCLUB
MAN-MADE
PEMA, 2005

With Tortoise's John McEntire producing, TFC's increasingly CSN tendencies came backed with stark post-rock textures on this eighth outing, creating a curiously muted amalgam of sun-kissed '70s songwriting and Stereolab insouciance.

345 LOCAL NATIVES
GORILLA MANOR
INFECTIOUS, 2009

Early to the polyrhythmic Afro-indie party, and hoarding many of the genre's best tunes in the likes of "Sun Hands" and the boldly forlorn "Airplanes", LA alt.rockers Local Natives channelled Yeasayer, Fleet Foxes and Grizzly Bear into a lush and accessible art-pop debut.

342 BRITISH SEA POWER
DO YOU LIKE ROCK MUSIC?
ROUGH TRADE, 2008

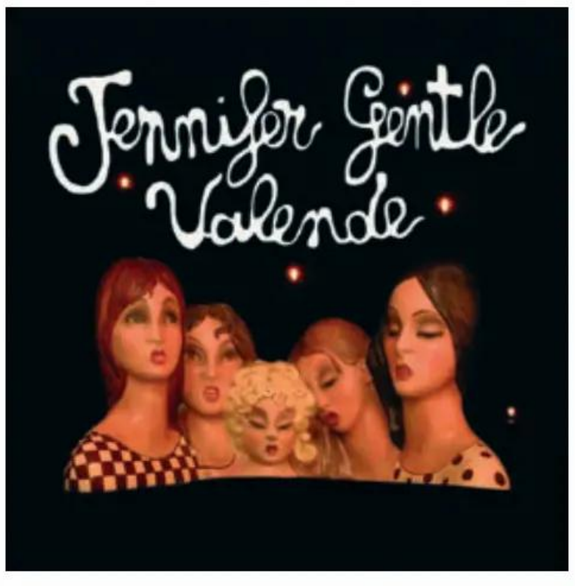
In the wake of Arcade Fire's *Funeral*, British Sea Power (as was) delivered a chilly, churchy Cumbrian equivalent in a third album with the producers of AF, Jarvis Cocker and Godspeed... in the mix, and sounding like just such a sonic cross-breed.

341 THE HIGH LLAMAS
BEET, MAIZE & CORN
DRAG CITY, 2003

Out went the guitars and synths of *Buzzle Bee* and before; in came the sort of orchestral and brass arrangements that only served to greater realise Sean O'Hagan's role as *Pet Sounds* acolyte.

340 ISOBEL CAMPBELL & MARK LANEGAN
BALLAD OF THE BROKEN SEAS V2, 2006

An angel and a devil went dancing? You'd think so from the marriage of Mark Lanegan's brimstone growl and Isobel Campbell's airy lilts on this Mercury prize shortlister. Deathly jigs, dusky blues and Satan's own "Scarborough Fair" adaptations; this was Nancy and Lee to the extreme.



339 JENNIFER GENTLE
VALENDE

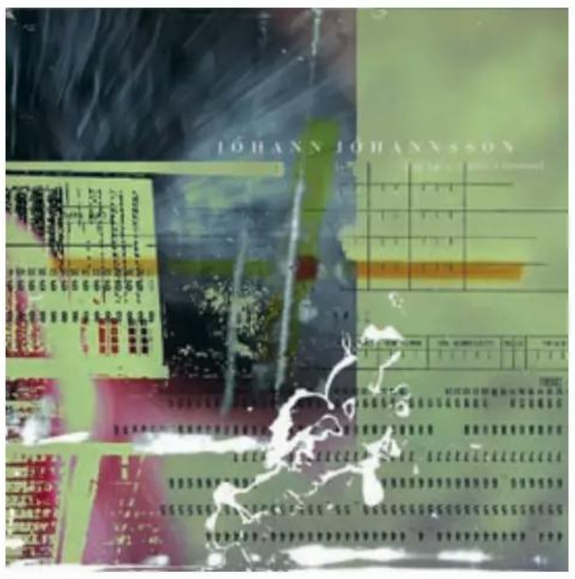
SUB POP, 2005

The whimsical spectres of Syd Barrett, Bowie, Nick Drake and The Kinks hung over the fourth from these Italian retro rockers armed with kazoos, toy glockenspiels, plastic flutes and an affectionate, no-fi – and occasionally unsettling – way with '60s psych folk and beat pop.

336 THE STILLS
LOGIC WILL BREAK YOUR HEART

VICE, 2003

Interpol's shadowy art-pop gets a far more melodic remake from a Montreal act in touch with the glamour and grace of classic rock'n'roll. The songs slyly reference Alison Krauss and Of Montreal, but The Cure and the Bunnymen are closer cousins.



335 JÓHANN JÓHANNSSON
IBM 1401: A USER'S MANUAL 4AD, 2006

Inspired by his dad, one of Iceland's first computer programmers, constructing melodies on IBM computers on early hardware during breaks, Jóhannsson's fourth built electromagnetic emissions from an IBM 1401 – and its instruction tapes – into grand, swelling orchestral edifices.

332 PAUL McCARTNEY
CHAOS AND CREATION IN THE BACKYARD

PARLOPHONE, 2005

Playing almost everything himself and going head-to-head with an unyielding Nigel Godrich bore fruit on Macca's 13th solo effort. Intimate without sentimentality, whimsical without being cloying (excepting "English Tea"), *Chaos...* was the most heartfelt of his fine 'oos run.

331 MARK LANEGAN
BUBBLEGUM

BEGGARS BANQUET, 2004

PJ Harvey, Josh Homme and Greg Dulli were among those helping Lanegan magnificently hit rock bottom on this growl from the abyss. Suicide drum machines, spectral guitars and bursts of febrile blues rock encase tales of drugs, despair and a divorce coming fast down the tracks.

328 TENNISCOATS
WE ARE EVERYONE

MAJIKICK, 2004

Saya and Takashi Ueno's avant-pop outfit, backed by a revolving cast of musicians, produced a first full album of no little charm and wonder; gentle chamber folk brushed with flute, organ and the guitar licks of a 'White Album' ballad demo.

327 DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE
TRANSATLANTICISM

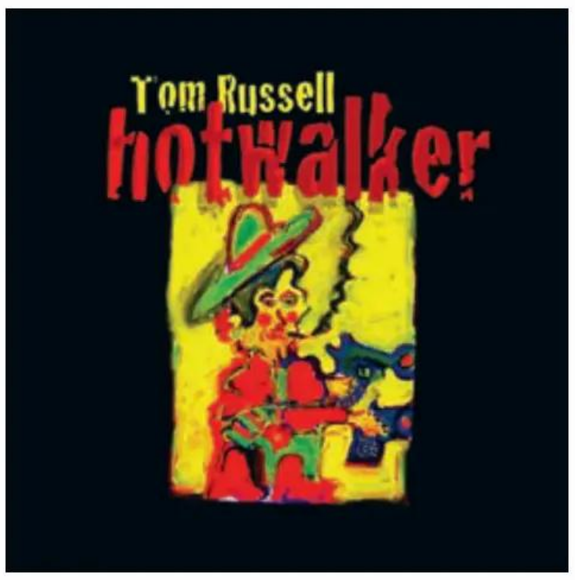
BARSUK, 2003

Rough at heart and oceanic of power-chord, Death Cab's fourth – detailing the trials of long-distance love – came to define their "indie era" thanks to the bristling might of "The New Year", and the sheer enormity of the seven-minute title track.

324 JAMIE T
PANIC PREVENTION

VIRGIN, 2007

The social incisiveness of The Streets met the sparking energies of Arctic Monkeys on Jamie Treays' crackling rap/folk/punk debut, making heroes of the drunk, the desperate and the down-to-party on "Sheila", "If You Got The Money" and "Calm Down Dearest".



323 TOM RUSSELL
HOTWALKER

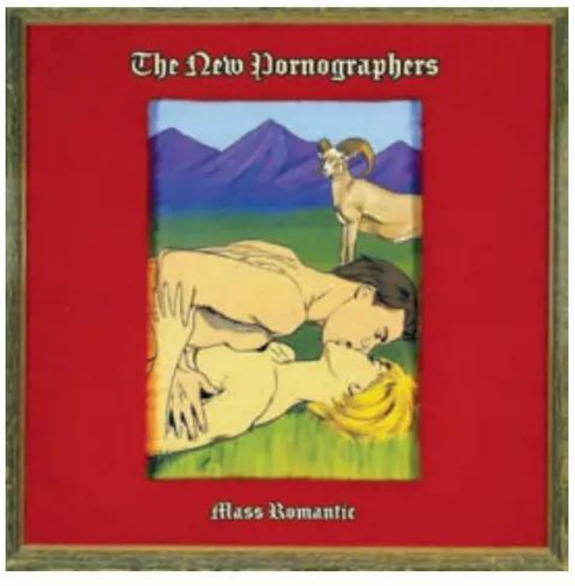
HIGHTONE, 2005

A deep dive into outsider culture of the '50s and '60s – its brothels, honky-tonks, carnivals and LA dive bars – narrated through Americana song and the real voices of Charles Bukowski, Jack Kerouac, Lenny Bruce, Dave van Ronk and circus midget Little Jack Horner.

338 BOB DYLAN
BOOTLEG SERIES VOL 7 – NO DIRECTION HOME: THE SOUNDTRACK

COLUMBIA, 2005

Accompanying Martin Scorsese's TV documentary, the (actually) fifth Bootleg release gathered revealing early recordings, alternative studio outtakes (heavy on *Highway...*) and live takes including that Newport version of "Maggie's Farm".



337 THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS
MASS ROMANTIC

MINT, 2000

A Vancouver supergroup coheres around a clutch of Carl Newman and Dan Bejar's most jubilant indie-pop tunes evoking T Rex, Bowie, The Beatles and new wave power pop – even on tracks called "The Slow Descent Into Alcoholism" and "Execution Day". Neko Case stuns.

334 ANDREW CHALK
FALL IN THE WAKE OF A FLAWLESS LANDSCAPE

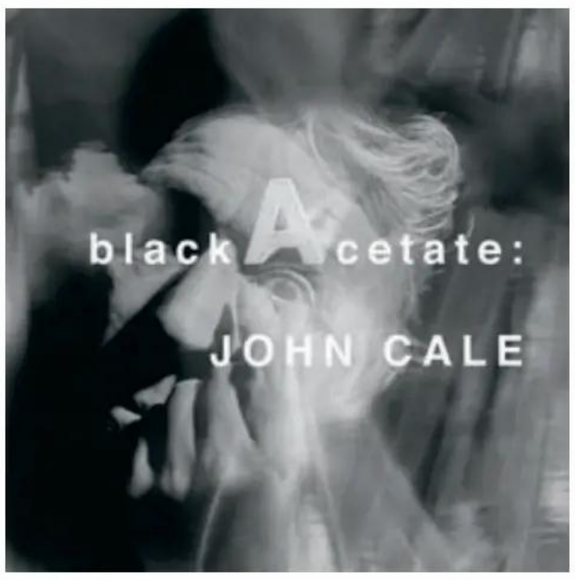
THREE POPLARS, 2003

The landscapes evoked by these two side-long pieces from the Hull artist behind Ferial Confine sounded far from flawless. Glitches quietly invaded their haunted, hypnotic drones and an eerie atmosphere suggested something wicked crept through their undergrowth.

333 THE RAPTURE
ECHOES

DFA, 2003

The centrepiece act of James Murphy's DFA Records, The Rapture encapsulated New York's funk-punk scene with the intense electro-grooves of their debut: "Sister Saviour", "Echoes", the cowbell crazed "House Of Jealous Lovers". Gang Of Four on an electrified dancefloor.



330 JOHN CALE
BLACKACETATE

EMI, 2005

Returning from the trip-hop and trance of 2003's *Hobosapiens*, Cale and funk sidekick Herb Graham Jr squirm around in safer territory: rock, folk, country blues, psychedelic noise. But Cale manipulates his sources with an art rock pioneer's panache and can't help indulging in an avant-techno splurge on "Brotherman".

329 THE CHARLATANS
WONDERLAND

UNIVERSAL, 2001

Cruising Sunset listening to Isaac Hayes on "LA coke, lots of it", as they put it – plus recruiting Danny Saber – made its mark on the Charlies' sun-filled seventh. An electronic soul-funk album emerged, Tim Burgess frequently in falsetto and the band kicking into party mode.

326 ELECTRELANE
THE POWER OUT

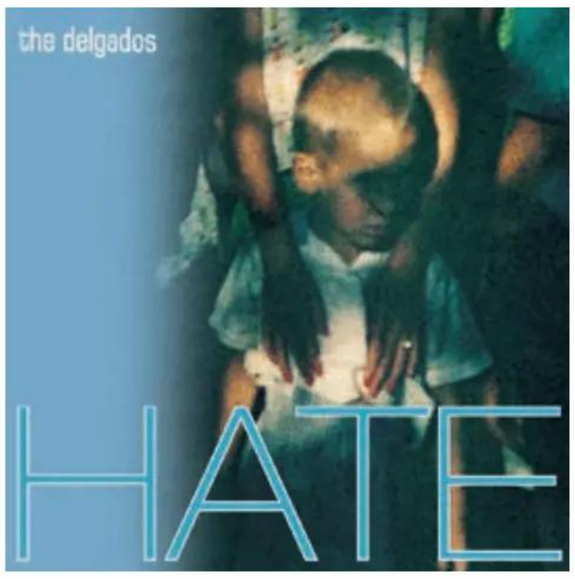
TOO PURE, 2004

Referencing Nietzsche, 16th-century Spanish sonnets, the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon and Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel *The Well Of Loneliness* – and occasionally singing entirely in French – the Brighton experimentalists add literate vocals, striking chorales and pop melodies to their Neu!-meets-Velvets stew.

325 THE DARKNESS
PERMISSION TO LAND

ATLANTIC, 2003

Who knew emulating Queen would prove so successful? The self-mocking Lowestoft revivalists' debut became a two-million-selling phenomenon by dint of xeroxing '70s glam and hard rock with its tongue between both cheeks, but riffs and hooks of unironically irresistible quality.



322 THE DELGADOS
HATE

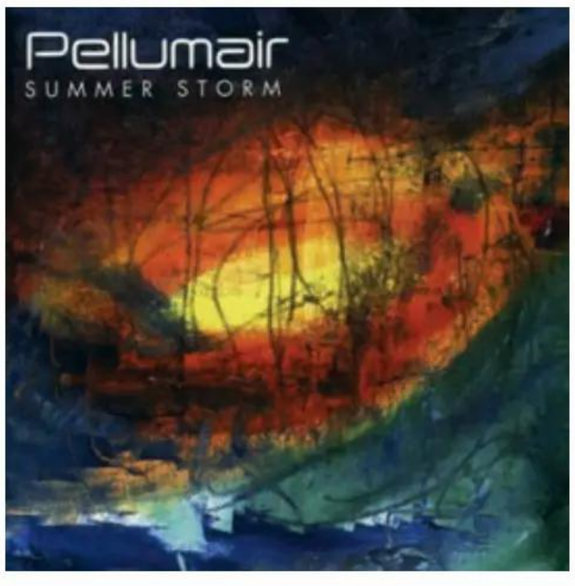
MANTRA, 2002

The symphonic indie-pop of *The Great Eastern* bled through to its equally momentous sequel. The acerbic themes of "Child Killers", "All You Need Is Hate" and "Coming In From The Cold" are offset by romantic, Disney-sized orchestrations and sheer melodic euphoria.

321 BLACK MOUNTAIN
BLACK MOUNTAIN

JAGJAGUWAR, 2005

Stoner rock rarely fit the moniker as well as on this Vancouver debut of considerable psychedelic heaviness. Noir Americana, krautrock electronics and *White Light/White Heat* art rock vibes pierce the granite at times; otherwise, take a Sherpa.



320 PELLUMAIR SUMMER STORM

TUGBOAT, 2005

Southampton dream poppers Jaymie Caplen and Tom Stanton had already split by the time their sole album as Pellumair was released. Their legacy? A rare two-acoustic evocation of Low, Galaxie 500 and Simon & Garfunkel, sporadically kicked in the chest by the dark side of MBV's shoe.

319 HARD-FI STARS OF CCTV

NECESSARY RECORDS/ ATLANTIC, 2005

Enter the new 'oos sound of the suburbs. Staines' electro-rock massive deployed disco, ska and own-brand riot pop on infectious anthems of weekend benders, young offenders, working-class drama and being the Brad Pitts of the surveillance screen.

316 KAITO BAND RED

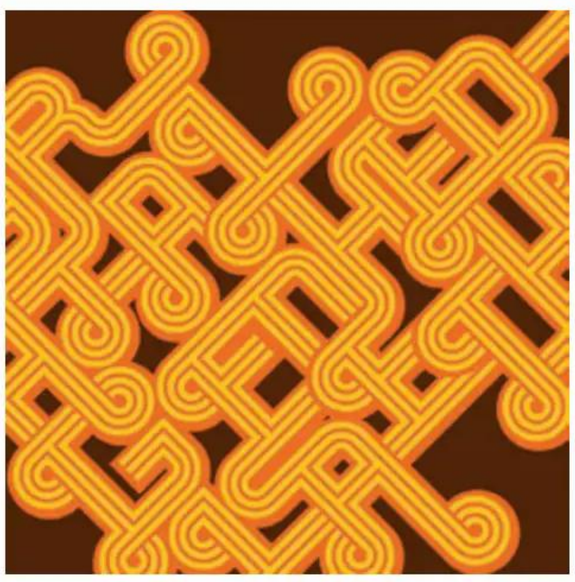
SPINART/MUTE, 2003

Before Factory Floor, Nikki Colk fronted Norwich's art-punk combo KaitO, her feverish yelps and howls running amok across Wire-like guitars and background screams on this second album like an even more feral – but just as tuneful – Karen O.

315 AIMEE MANN BACHELOR NO 2 OR, THE LAST REMAINS OF THE DODO

SUPEREGO, 2000

Released independently and inspired by her frustrations with the Geffen machine, Mann's third – cribbed partly from her own *Magnolia* soundtrack – found the uncompromising Virginia songbird more assured than ever in her intimacy and songcraft.



312 GRUFF RHYS YR ATAL GENHEDLAETH

PLACID CASUAL, 2005

The Super Furry Animals frontman went solo like a valleys McCartney: kitchen-sounding recordings sung in his native Welsh tongue. SFA's eclecticism survived though, songs skipping easily between minimalist electro-glam, grainy garage pop and no-fi hip-hop.

311 THE WITCHES UNIVERSAL MALL

FALL OF ROME, 2001

The main band of Detroit journeyman Troy Gregory – of the Dirtbombs, Prong and plenty more – proved themselves the match of any Motor City contemporaries on a second crammed with garage-psych guitar storms and '60s acid-pop savvy.

308 ANAÏS MITCHELL HYMNS FOR THE EXILED

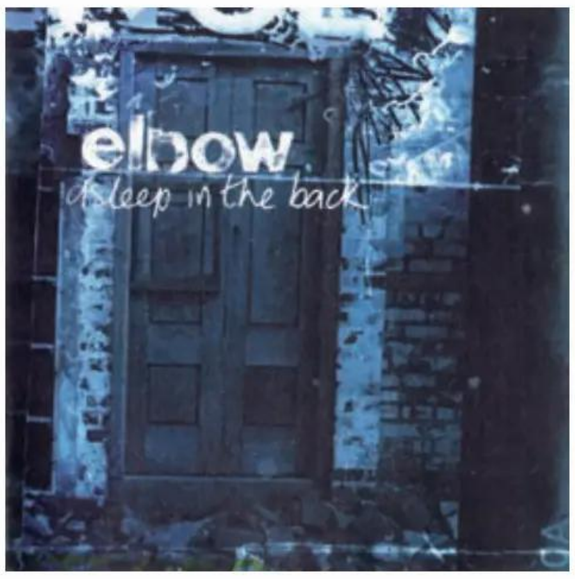
WATERBUG, 2004

There's literate indie-folk and then there's Mitchell's entrancing second collection, weaving her romantic acoustic tales of cosmic America around shameless references to TS Elliot's *The Wasteland* and Orwell's *1984*. A thing of bookish beauty.

307 BECK GUERO

INTERSCOPE, 2005

Returning from *Sea Change*'s melancholic brink and reunited with the Dust Brothers, Beck summoned the Chicano LA influence on his upbringing and his early slacker-hop vivacity for a Latin-infused block party record ("E-Pro", "Girl") with a faintly bruised heart ("Missing", "Go It Alone").



304 ELBOW ASLEEP IN THE BACK

V2, 2001

A nocturnal introduction to the Manchester mood rockers, wherein the enormity and heady sonics of Doves are applied to narcoleptic drone pop ("Any Day Now"), gentle billow ballads ("Red") and closing-time jazz bar musings ("Don't Mix Your Drinks").

303 JUANA MOLINA UN DIA

DOMINO, 2008

A one-time sketch-comedy actress who quit her own show to follow the folktronica calling. Avant-pop Argentinian artist Molina had earned great acclaim as an electronic experimentalist by the time this fifth album was tracing enticing melodies through its layers of abstract loops and Latin rhythms.

318 SUNN O))) MONOLITHS AND DIMENSIONS

SOUTHERN LORD, 2009

Choirs, orchestras, planet-forming poetry and chords from the centre of the Earth fuse at an elemental level on the drone-metal overlords' mightiest hour. Intended less as a work of symphonic black-metal ambience than an evocation of the timbre of feedback. Still crushes.

317 ERYKAH BADU MAMA'S GUN

MOTOWN/PUPPY LOVE, 2000

Badu's long-awaited second gathered Questlove, Roy Ayers, jazz trumpeter Roy Hargrove and several more Soulquarians in service of a smooth, confessional neo-soul sister-piece to D'Angelo's *Voodoo*, out to both exorcise muted demons and inspire struggling sisters everywhere.

314 RICHARD YOUNGS AIRS OF THE EAR

JAGJAGUWAR, 2003

From Cambridge via Glasgow, Youngs is an under-sung master of mingling lo-fi folk drones and musique concrète collage. This fifth album is a trance-folk delight; the 17-minute "Machaut's Dream", for example, drifts by on spirit guitar and hovering theremin en route to a chaotic noise climax.

313 THE FEELING TWELVE STOPS AND HOME

ISLAND, 2006

Unpretentious bubblegum pop-rock your flavour? The debut from Sussex multi-harmonisers The Feeling had all the varieties: '70s drivetime soft rock ("Never Be Lonely"), Macca piano jingle ("Fill My Little World"), even '80s ELO doing Huey Lewis & The News ("Love It When You Call").

310 MELCHIOR PRODUCTIONS THE MEANING

PLAYHOUSE, 2004

They called it microhouse, the minimalist techno beats, glitches and Europop shades that characterised Thomas Melchior's influential debut. "Over The Rise" was the standout, where glacial run-offs seemed to drip gently onto Melchior's fizzing circuits.

309 DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS THE DIRTY SOUTH

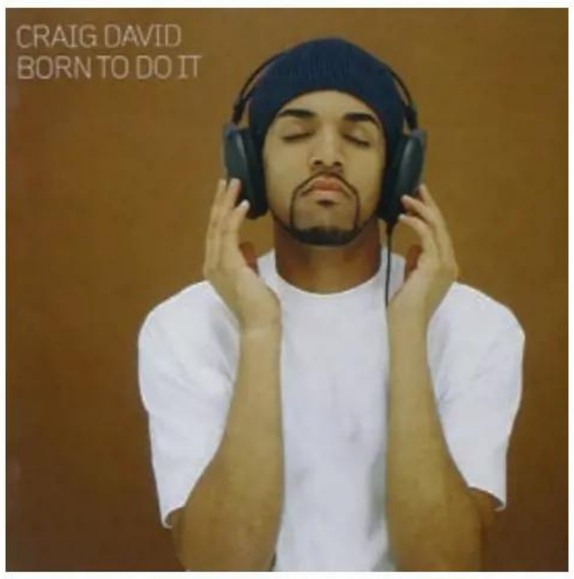
NEW WEST, 2004

John Henry, The Band, John Wayne, Sun Records, vice-cracking cops, moonshiners, dealers and gamblers: the Truckers' fifth delved deep into the noblest and grimiest corners of the dirty South in tones of raucous gothic Americana that often brushed the heroic.

306 HEM EVENINGLAND

ROUNDER, 2004

If sepia were a sound it wouldn't be too far in shade from the second Hem album. Its Appalachian folk, drenched in sweeping '70s strings and refined roots homage, could have been crate-dug from a Laurel Canyon yard sale by Mazzy Star or The Sundays.



305 CRAIG DAVID BORN TO DO IT

WILDSTAR, 2000

Craig popularised UK garage to the tune of over seven million sales thanks to his R&B club-to-boudoir approach and week-long bedroom stamina. This debut was the accessible breakthrough that oiled the hinges of a door Dizzee Rascal and So Solid Crew would kick clean off.

302 THE HANDSOME FAMILY TWILIGHT

LOOSE MUSIC, 2001

A kind of truck-stop Bad Seeds, Brett and Rennie Sparks, on their sixth outing, offered dolorous noir Americana. Out pour tales of Southern suburban murder, suicide and dead pets, as if from the dim-lit corner of New Mexico's most morbid open-mic night.

301 BLUE STATES NOTHING CHANGES UNDER THE SUN

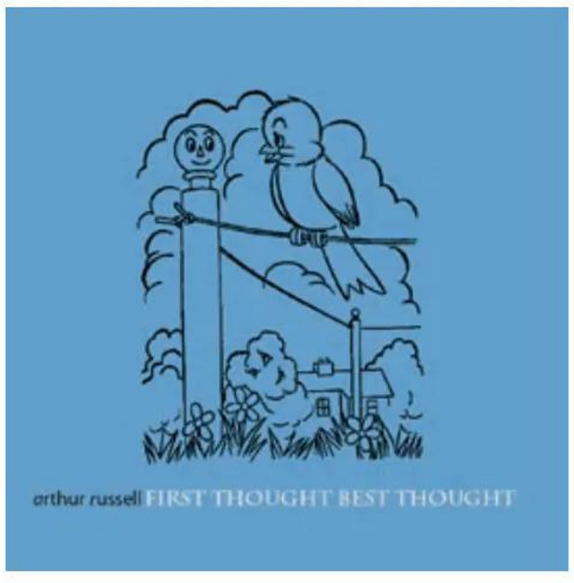
MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES, 2001

On Andy Dragazis's bedroom-born debut, his crackling and propulsive electronica set out to serve – rather than shatter or throttle – the classic Americana, orchestral soul and chanson with which it shared its grooves.

300 CANNIBAL OX THE COLD VEIN

DEF JUX, 2001

Produced by Def Jux label boss El-P – formerly of Company Flow, latterly of Run The Jewels – *The Cold Vein* remains a high-water mark for underground hip-hop. Sampling Giorgio Moroder and Philip Glass, its imperious sci-fi beats cast rappers Vast Aire and Vordul Mega as stern chroniclers of a dystopian New York.



299 ARTHUR RUSSELL FIRST THOUGHT BEST THOUGHT

ROUGH TRADE, 2006

The Arthur Russell legacy project continued, wonderfully, with this two-disc set. "Instrumentals Vol 1" was conceived as an instrumental suite lasting two days, the units of composition ebbing and flowing. Even at just an hour, the vibe (pastoral, woodwind minatures for endless lofts) is spellbinding.

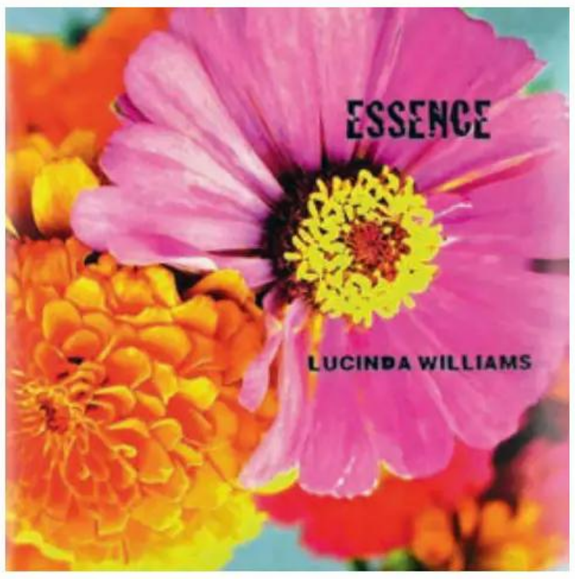
296 THE BREEDERS TITLE TK

4AD, 2002

Not someone to follow an obvious path, Kim Deal followed the resounding success of *The Last Splash* with years of silence. When this third album eventually appeared it was with a different personnel, a strange lethargy, but all of the same eccentric sonic vision that characterised her more immediately accessible work.

295 SPARKS LIL' BEETHOVEN LIL' BEETHOVEN/ARTFUL, 2002

You might have thought Sparks too rococo to survive beyond the 1970s – and how wrong you would have been. Since the baroque pop of their heyday, the band had done synth-pop, only for this 19th classical-tinged album to find Ron and Russell Mael in gold thrones atop a characteristically over-egged pudding.



292 LUCINDA WILLIAMS ESSENCE

LOST HIGHWAY, 2001

Car Wheels On A Gravel Road gets a lot of love, but let's not underestimate the Band-like delicacy and coiled strength of this understated sixth album. Williams is in extraordinary voice throughout, "Blue" an unapologetic wrench on your heartstrings.

291 ESPERS II

DRAG CITY, 2006

The wonderful vocalist Meg Baird pulls a sword from a mist-covered lake on this second album from within the mid-decade psychedelic folk scene. Courtly poise, crystalline picking and organic drones are the natural matter from which they weave their magic.

288 THE HIVES YOUR NEW FAVOURITE BAND

POPTONES, 2001

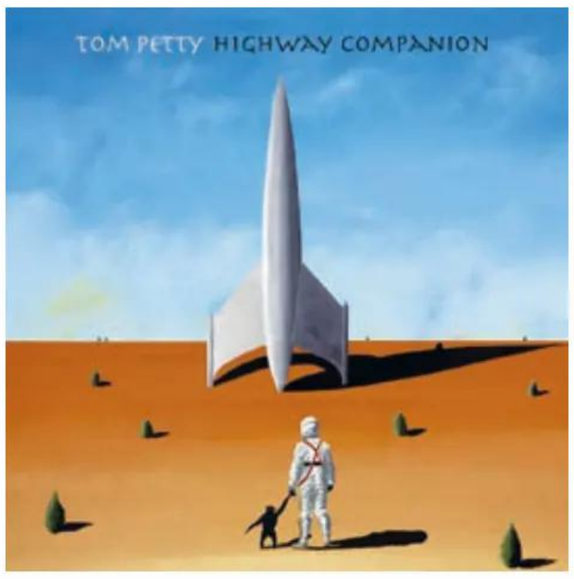
A phrase much overused in the music journalism of 20 years ago began life titling this fondly remembered, if one-note, compilation of Swedish garage rock. "I Hate To Say I Told You So" is the one you need, but it's not the only one to supply good-time Monks/Sonics noise.

287 THE WHITE STRIPES WHITE BLOOD CELLS SYMPATHY FOR THE RECORD INDUSTRY, 2001

It didn't start here for The White Stripes, precisely – but the madness did. Amid all the unexpected media exposure, John Peel enthusiasm and talk of the blues though, it was the songs which stood tall, the charm perhaps taller even than that.

284 SIX ORGANS OF ADMITTANCE SCHOOL OF THE FLOWER DRAG CITY, 2005

The folk idiom, and what befell it, was one of the great stories of the early 'oos. Ben Chasny's band here assembled a suite of entrancing holy-seeming relics, yet the surprises in this gentle scene included droning feedback and free drummer Chris Corsano's sympathetic roil.



283 TOM PETTY HIGHWAY COMPANION

WARNER BROS/AMERICAN, 2006

If it ain't broke... Petty's third solo album was made in a territory not unknown to him between Bob Dylan and The Byrds, and produced by Jeff Lynne. Still, there's plenty to like: wry shuffles, thoughtful acoustic ballads, songs with no hiding places.

298 LATE OF THE PIER
FANTASY BLACK CHANNEL PARLOPHONE, 2008

The sole album by the Castle Donington dance poppers, recorded in the throes of the "nu rave" explosion. Ubiquitous DJ Erol Alkan is at the controls to help turn this scattershot mix of post-punk riffing and beats into a slicker, if still manic affair.

297 ...AND YOU WILL KNOW US BY THE TRAIL OF DEAD
WORLDS APART
INTERSCOPE, 2005

Here the Texan conceptualists brought an epic scale to their post-At The Drive-In guitar madness. It suits them completely. In place of conventional songs, what you get is more of a show of strength, in which the voice battles to be heard against the post-hardcore torrent.

294 LIGHTNING BOLT
HYPERMAGIC MOUNTAIN LOAD, 2005

The rhythm section! On this fourth album Brian Chippendale (drums) and Brian Gibson (bass) caught something of the aggressive noise of their floor-level live shows. Gutteral bass noise, hardcore punk drumming, it's a short-stay destination, but good to say you've been.

293 SUSUMU YOKOTA
GRINNING CAT
LEAF, 2001

"Folktronica" had some momentum even before Kieran Hebden and Four Tet's *Rounds*. DJ/composer Susuma Yokota (d. 2015) made some lovely excursions into beats and bubbling textures here, organic instruments reminding us of the human element in his calm and digital world.

290 OM
CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS
HOLY MOUNTAIN, 2006

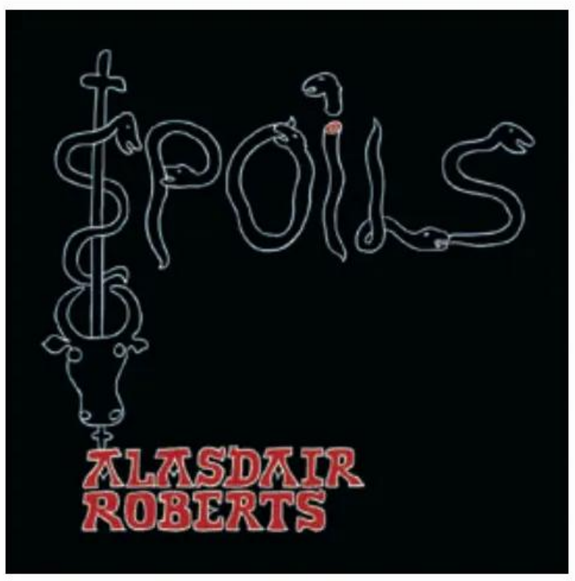
Stoned yoga picnic? An entrancing project of minimalist doom – this is Al Cisneros and Chris Hakius from Sleep – OM set up a groove of pared-back drums and bass, the better to salute the sunrise.

289 ST VINCENT
ACTOR
4AD, 2009

Second album from Annie Clark, art rock's elected leader 2009–2021. For all the cleverness, amazing guitar noises and entrancing vocal delivery, *Actor* found St Vincent still hardwired into the songs. "Save Me From What I Want" is a particular highlight.

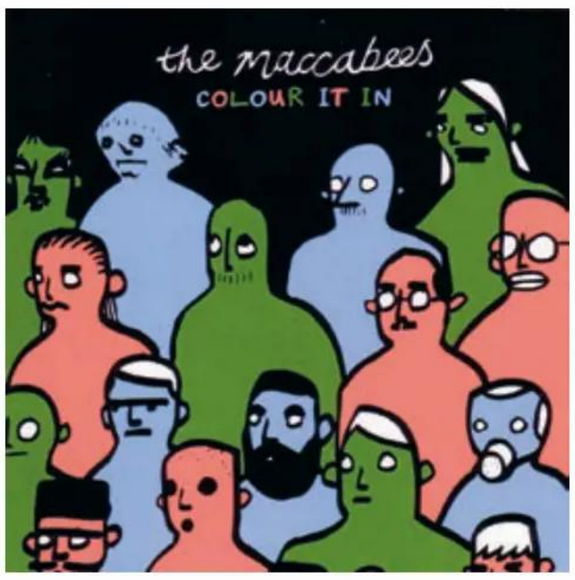
286 REIGNING SOUND
TIME BOMB HIGH SCHOOL IN THE RED, 2002

If you thought The White Stripes were renovating old forms, you needed to hear Greg Cartwright's Reigning Sound. This second album found them chanelling the values of old-time rock 'n' roll into an appealingly tight garage nouveau.



285 ALASDAIR ROBERTS
SPOILS
DRAG CITY, 2009

The Scottish musician was never a slick studio proposition, but this excellent sixth solo album found him paring things right back, the sound focused tight on his wonderful singing voice and unique vision. This one is elemental, magical, and up there with Will Oldham.



282 THE MACCABEES
COLOUR IT IN
POLYDOR, 2007

Orlando Weeks and his crew began their career with a quirky and characterful indie rock, which became progressively more streamlined on their way to the top. Here they're a great indie-rock band almost to the point of satire: busy guitars and ideas unable to contain themselves.

281 NEIL YOUNG
CHROME DREAMS II
REPRISE, 2007

Neil's unreleased recordings – great songs, whole albums planned but unreleased – were an itch that his creativity only occasionally allowed him to scratch. *Chrome Dreams II*, with a name dating from the mid-70s, actually featured songs from the 1980s. The 18-minute "Ordinary People" is the pick.

280 KELLY CLARKSON BREAKAWAY

RCA, 2004

The *American Idol* star doesn't mess about with anything less than full power on this second album. Looking for a way out of pop, she enlists a crack team of experts to help her over the wall into pop rock, and Max Martin is among those with an assist. Taylor Swift may have been watching.

279 NORTH SEA RADIO ORCHESTRA BIRDS

OOF!, 2008

Craig Fortnam is the quasi-classical brains behind this pleasantly lightweight project. Generally lovely settings of texts from Thomas Hardy, William Blake and others in interesting arrangements , somewhere between Penguin Café, Divine Comedy and Vaughan Willams.

276 ULRICH SCHNAUSS A STRANGELY ISOLATED PLACE

CITY CENTRE OFFICES, 2003

Much reissued work by the German musician, whose mournful vibes and beats are a helpful placebo to Boards Of Canada fans. And the ethereal vocal element helped reclassify Schnauss among the Breton shirts and distortion pedals of nu-gaze.

275 FUGAZI THE ARGUMENT

DISCHORD, 2001

Leaving as they started, at full tilt. The sixth and final Fugazi album was a summation of the best qualities of their vital 1990s albums: interlocking tunes, a sense of impending righteous explosion, that explosion shortly arriving.

272 JOHN CALE HOBOSAPIENS

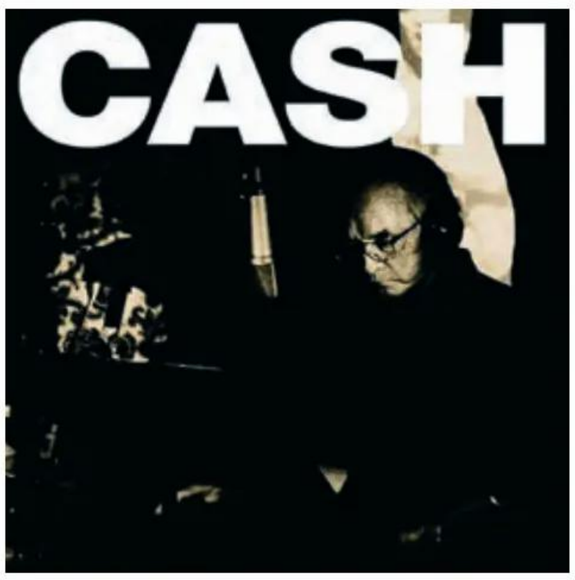
EMI, 2003

Nick Franglen helped Cale narrow the gap of time between ideas arriving and being able to get them on tape. The songs are still recognisably chewy conceits resolving art and sprituality, but Franglen's beats – and quirk pop tendencies – help the medicine slip down. The weirder it gets, the more Cale – and listener – are at home.

271 SIMON BOOKISH EVERYTHING/ EVERYTHING

TOMLAB, 2008

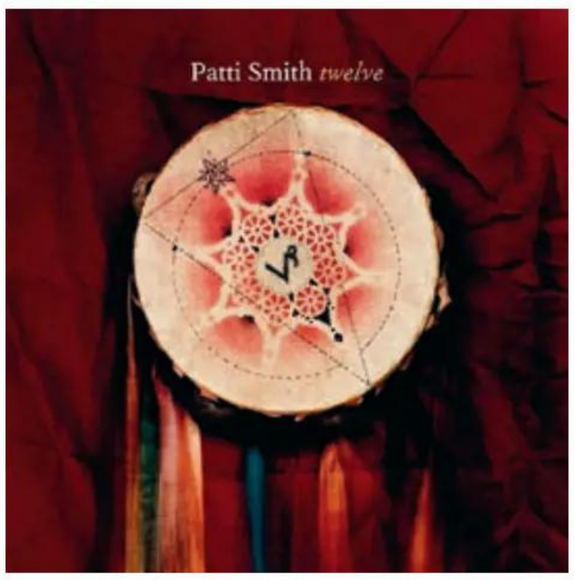
Leo Chadburn threw everything at the chamber/electronic pop wall here for this debut album. A kind of less clever Neil Hannon, it's not for everyone, but the songs often open out into genuinely delightful arrangements.



268 JOHNNY CASH AMERICAN V: A HUNDRED HIGHWAYS AMERICAN

RECORDINGS, 2006

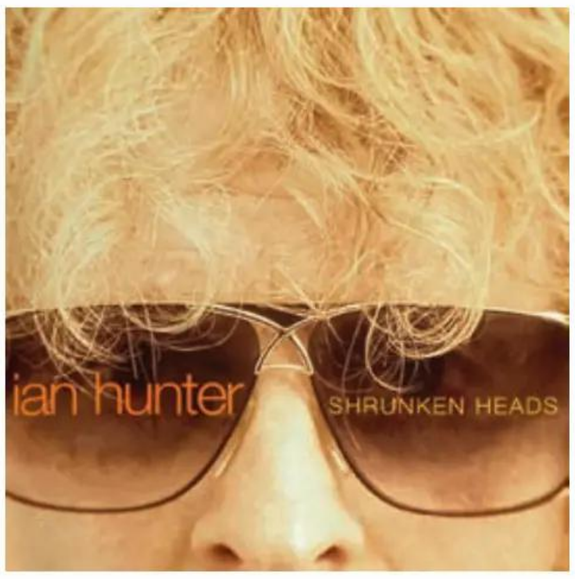
Even after his death, the man came around. Perhaps not quite as long on the drama as other volumes in the series where he took on unexpected covers, this still wielded major power. "God's Gonna Cut You Down" resounds with lifelong faith and conviction.



267 PATTI SMITH TWELVE

COLUMBIA, 2007

Patti Smith's career began by exploding the idea of the cover song as a redundant creative act. Over 30 years later she returned to the territory, undaunted by taking on massive songs by the greatest artists: Stones, Beatles, Hendrix. Results? Generally amazing.



264 IAN HUNTER SHRUNKEN HEADS

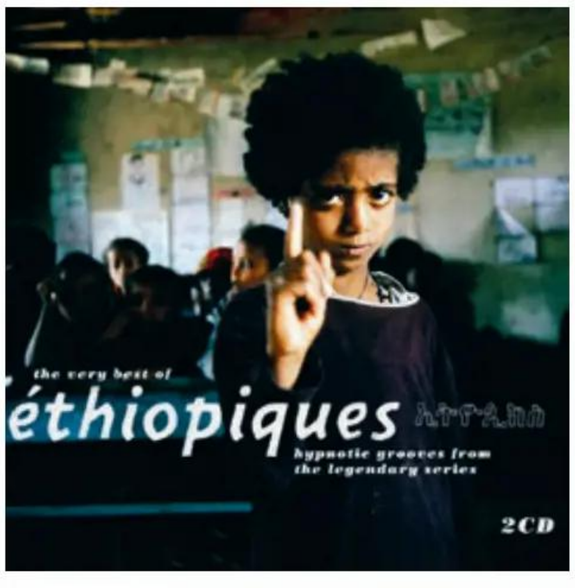
JERKIN CROCUS, 2007

Ian Hunter never changed his look, and never changed his style. This, his first for a decade, is all class: Jeff Tweedy on board, his glam lad rock morphed into a gentler Americana, his status as a legend a blessing not a curse.

263 KINGS OF CONVENIENCE QUIET IS THE NEW LOUD

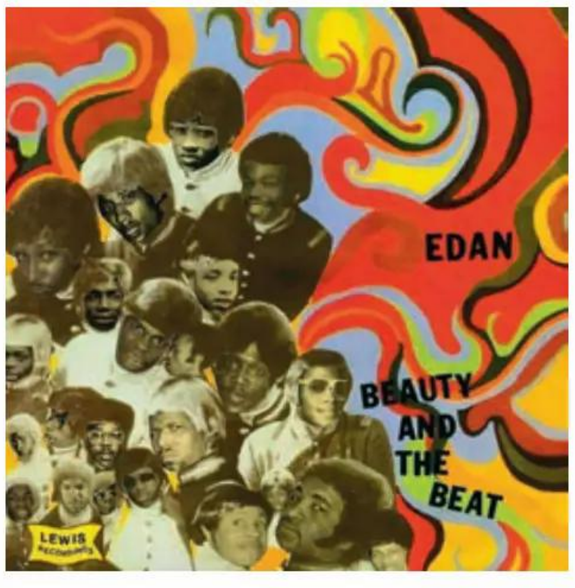
ASTRALWERKS, 2001

So sharply observed were they, Eirik Glambek Boe and Erlend Øye's crystalline acoustic songs cut through the noise of the time. Witty and heartfelt, songs like "I Don't Know What I Can Save You From" were exquisite miniatures that still stand tall.



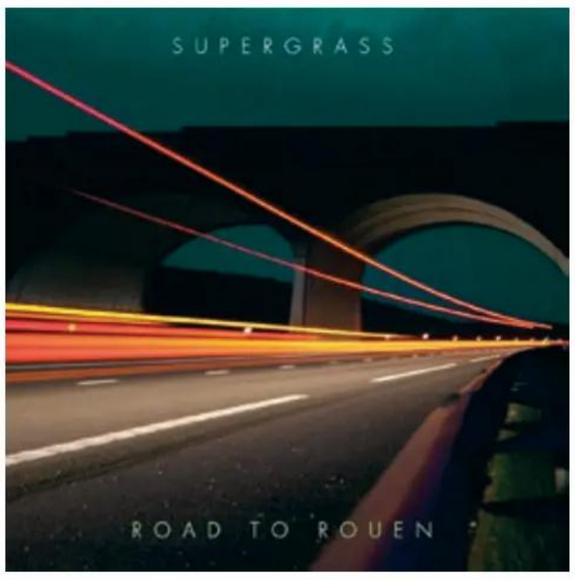
278 VARIOUS ARTISTS
THE VERY BEST OF ETHIOPIQUES MANTECA, 2007

Francis Falceto did the world an enormous favour when he began the Ethiopiques series in 1997. Collecting the extraordinary sounds released by artists including Haiglu Mergia, Mulatu Astatke, and Mahmoud Ahmed, the series cracked open a world of sound – this was your way in.



277 EDAN
BEAUTY AND THE BEAT
LEWIS RECORDINGS, 2005

Overground hip-hop was enjoying a boom time; so in a different way was the underground. The second album from the Maryland MC took an old-school flow and dexterity with dense samples to hypnotic, psychedelic effect.



274 SUPERGRASS
ROAD TO ROUEN
PARLOPHONE, 2005

Pun notwithstanding, this was an older and more serious Supergrass. Straining already at the limits of the pop rock that established them, they launched themselves at a target somewhere between Pink Floyd, the Groundhogs and 10cc. Melancholic, impressive, and unfairly overlooked.

273 PAUL McCARTNEY
MEMORY ALMOST FULL HEAR MUSIC, 2007

Good title! Macca's 13th studio album, released the year he was eligible for his state pension, was – as they all were on some level – retrospective. It's a sparky effort – he sounds like he's heard the MGMT album – but the singles, like "Ever Present Past", are the best and most innovative bits.

270 LOU REED
ECSTASY
REPRISE, 2000

Full-bore Lou here, the production allowing the guitars (and lyrics; hear "White Prism", jeez, for details) to snarl at full power, while still referencing (as with "Tatters") his classic early-1970s soundworld. No-one says "*Edinburgh*" like Lou.

269 M83
DEAD CITIES, RED SEAS & LOST GHOSTS GOOOM, 2003

More skirmishes from the debated district between electronica and shoegaze. On this strong second album, Anthony Gonzalez and Nicolas Fromageau lean full-tilt into the melodrama, with dreamy vocals and epic Lynchian dives into mood and texture.

266 MADNESS
THE LIBERTY OF NORTON FOLGATE
LUCKY SEVEN, 2009

The Nutty Boys follow the heavy heavy monster sound of local history. Customarily melodic hymn to multicultural London from Mike Barson and co, with many co-writes testifying to the strength of the revivified group. The bittersweet quality of the band's classic era intermittently shines.

265 THE HOLLOWAYS
SO THIS IS GREAT BRITAIN? TVT, 2006

The guerrilla indie group – there was a time where no phonebox was safe from a flash mob-style gig – make its debut. "Generator", an unassuming but very catchy ska-pop song, helped elevate this above the ranks of cut-price post-Libertines bands.

262 THEO PARRISH
PARALLEL DIMENSIONS
SOUND SIGNATURE, 2000

What DJ Shadow was to 1990s hip-hop, so Theo Parrish is to 2000s house – an architect whose digging has helped him create new structures from sampled materials. This second album was his breakthrough: the jazzy flavour and repetition as characterful as it was mildly psychedelic.

261 SIOUXSIE SIOUX
MANTARAY
UNIVERSAL, 2007

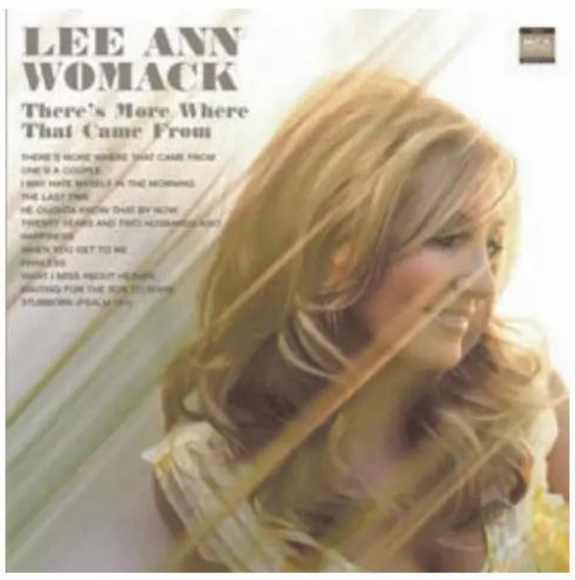
The fact that this was then the first and remains the only Siouxsie solo album, suggests this is someone not wishing to ruin their legacy by taking it to the bank. Post-Garbage robotic-pop for the most part, it was sharp but not forbiddingly spiky.

260 SPOON
KILL THE MOONLIGHT
MERGE, 2002

A very good one, the fourth Spoon album. Never mind the Strokes and Stripes going off around them – Britt Daniel and co keep it very tight indeed. The succinct tunes, on-rails focus and nasal delivery occasionally make them sound like the LCD Soundsystem you can't dance to.

259 EARTH
HEX: OR PRINTING IN THE INFERNAL METHOD
SOUTHERN LORD, 2005

The album which marked Dylan Carlson's move away from heavy drone and toward spaghetti doom. Still heavy, Earth now felt as if they moved more across a wide desert panorama, kicking up ghosts in their wake.



256 LEE ANN WOMACK
THERE'S MORE WHERE THAT CAME FROM
MCA NASHVILLE, 2005

Neither pop country, new country nor anything like it, this was old school: pedal steel, fiddles and tears. All points covererd. Strong self-assertion. Wise-after-the-event ballad. The full emotional rollercoaster was here, and the people loved it.

255 BEIRUT
GULAG ORKESTAR
BA DA BING, 2006

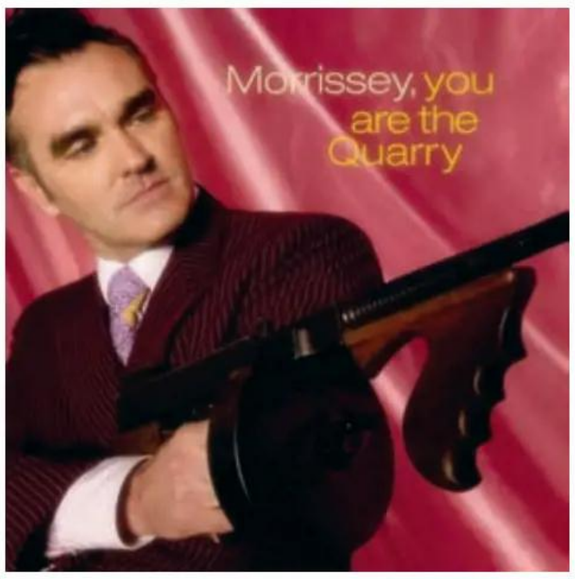
The remarkable debut of New Mexico native Zach Condon. A big idea with a small budget, here Condon essentially conjured a Balkan after-hours club circa 1937. Trumpet, weeping violin, mandolin... the whole was relatable even as it was impossibly remote.

252 AT THE DRIVE-IN
RELATIONSHIP OF COMMAND
GRAND ROYAL/FEARLESS/VIRGIN, 2000

If you saw them live, or destroy the *Later...* studio on TV, you could swear to the unstable nature of At The Drive-In. This major debut somehow contained their explosion for 49 minutes of untenably fierce, passionate and surprisingly moving music.

251 FALL OUT BOY
INFINITY ON HIGH
ISLAND, 2007

"This Ain't A Scene, It's An Arms Race" was about the size of it. Pete Wentz's band moved their ambitions further from their home planet of emo rock and into the wider pop universe. Impressive, but the brickwalled sound didn't leave you much choice in the matter.



248 MORRISSEY
YOU ARE THE QUARRY
ATTACK, 2004

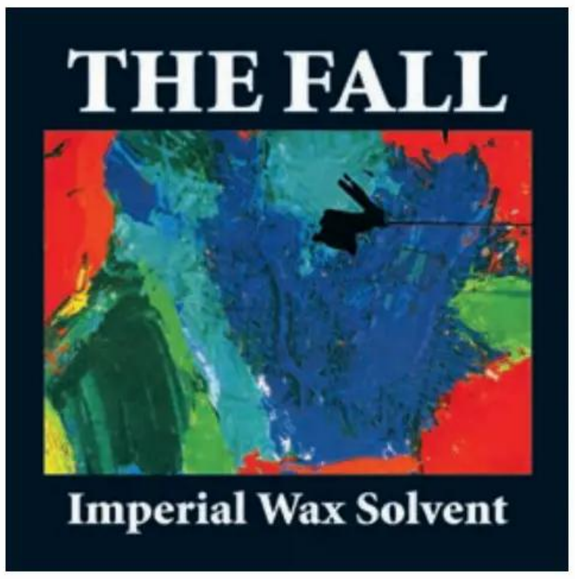
Mozzer's last half-decent gasp was *You Are The Quarry*, an album where he sounded revived, bringing back some of the punch and wit of earlier times. The songs are stronger than usual, the album sounds energised; there's spirit left here.

247 PICTURES AND SOUND
PICTURES AND SOUND
VANGUARD, 2008

The only album by this Luke Reynolds project, his second group after Blue Merle. It falls loosely into the same world as Modest Mouse, whose producer Reynolds works with here; jangling guitars gifted depth with unlikely turns. Willie Nelson guests.

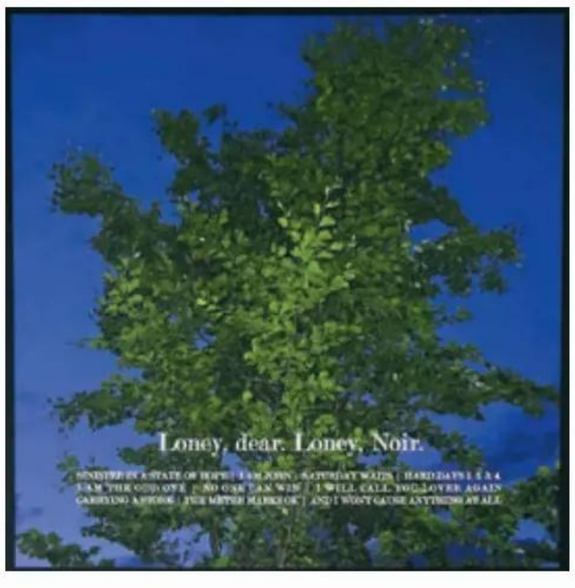
244 MANSUN
LITTLE KIX
PARLOPHONE, 2000

Their final album before dissolving three years later, on *Little Kix* Mansun breathe out, embracing a weird, woozy progginess at times. Elsewhere, they come across a little like Suede's kid brothers (post-Butler era), all lush languor and itchy post-punk energy.



243 THE FALL
IMPERIAL WAX SOLVENT
SANCTUARY, 2008

In the fourth decade of The Fall's unstable reign, their ability to magic up an album as coherent, hilarious and sussed as *Imperial Wax Solvent* is heroic. Mark E Smith's as scabrous as ever here, casting aspersions far and wide.

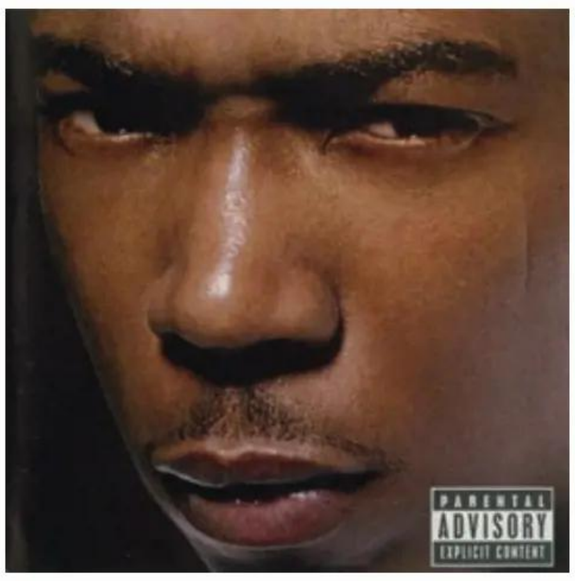


258 LONEY DEAR
LONEY, NOIR
SUB POP, 2007

Emil Svanängen had the skills to make his world audible beyond his bedroom. A kind of synth-pop Bon Iver, his self-released music was miraculously discovered by Sub Pop records, who recognised its gentle clarity. This remains a quiet, slightly Christmassy joy.

257 BLINK-182
BLINK-182
GEFFEN, 2003

The problem with the 1990s punk revival was it was... too punk. Blink-182 rectified that issue by regrouping for a fifth album with songs that were essentially FM rock staples of uncontroversial subject matter, just played a bit faster. The tallest dwarf in their career thus far.



254 JA RULE
R.U.L.E.
THE INC/ISLAND DEF JAM, 2004

In the era of the 72-minute CD, a hip-hop artiste had time to display all his credentials: from thug to crossover success story. Ja Rule's albums – hooky, smoochy, more skits than you'd hear these days – had the lot. Here "Wonderful" was your hit, which plays at least as well as his bad-boy sides.

253 ISOLÉE
REST
PLAYHOUSE, 2000

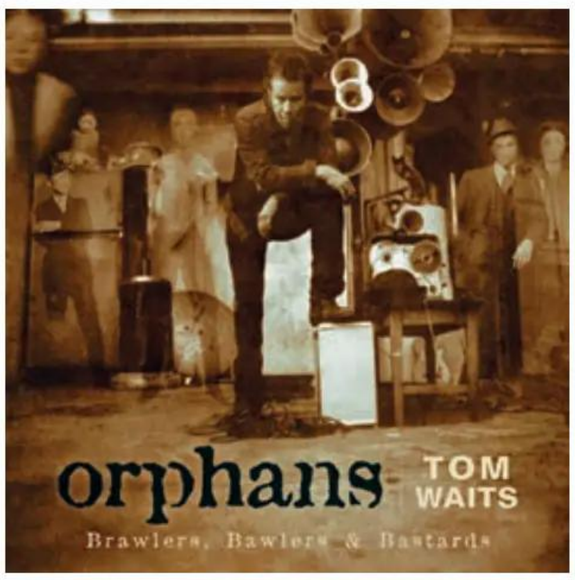
This debut from Frankfurt's Isolée is like an electro *Hymns Ancient And Modern*. They call it "microhouse", but Rajko Müller was punching well above that class. Calling back to Kraftwerk and '80s New York but with a crisp perversity all its own, it was familiar but futureproofed.

250 THE MAGNETIC FIELDS
I
NONESUCH, 2004

After *69 Love Songs*, it was hard to know quite what Stephin Merrit would do. Turns out he lost the synths, went alphabetical (concepts being his reason to be), embraced cabaret (again), and amped up the sadness. Business as unusual.

249 MODEST MOUSE
GOOD NEWS FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE BAD NEWS
EPIC, 2004

Their fourth album, and the one that marked out their territory most effectively: expansive indie rock that nods, at times, back to the gangly energy of post-punk; elsewhere, the grand sweep of the songs suggests something like an American Bunnymen.



246 TOM WAITS
ORPHANS: BRAWLERS, BAWLERS AND BASTARDS
ANTI-, 2006

It's wild to think someone's dedicated several decades of their career to being the next Harry Partch. As *Orphans* admirably proves, Tom Waits has done a pretty good job of channelling inventor weirdness into his own knock-kneed blues.

245 SONIC YOUTH
MURRAY STREET
DGC, 2002

Not so much a return to form for the legendary New York quintet, but a tightening up for a third phase – the guitars had never sounded so much like Television, the songs never more sparklingly melancholy. Deep and spiralling, eternally.

242 HAL
HAL
ROUGH TRADE, 2005

Part of a small wave of Irish groups who broke cover in the mid-'90s, Hal had the same kind of cojones as The Thrills; earthy harmonies, Beatlesque melancholy, though the spirit that really seems to guide *Hal* is The Waterboys.

241 NEKO CASE
FOX CONFESSOR BRINGS THE FLOOD
ANTI-, 2006

One of Case's finest albums, *Fox Confessor...* is ornate, baroque country, very much in the spirit of the music of some of the guests here – Giant Sand's Howe Gelb, Calexico, The Sadies. Case's ace: observational stylisation that's gentle, but cutting.

240 HIS NAME IS ALIVE
SOME DAY MY BLUES WILL COVER THIS EARTH 4AD, 2001

Warren Defever's masterstroke here, after a decade of genre-hopping, was finding that R&B was the perfect fit for his hypnotic, mantra-like pop songs. The end result was full of gospel yearning and longing, a homebody's dark night of the soul.

239 DIEFENBACH
SET & DRIFT
WE LOVE YOU/WALL OF SOUND/PIAS, 2005

Denmark's Diefenbach have learned lessons from international colleagues like Doves, Elbow, even Coldplay: an earnestness chimes throughout their third album, *Set & Drift*, that's equal parts dramatic and ambitious. It's indie as genre, not politic; soaring, sweeping guitar rock.

236 YEAH YEAH YEAHS
IT'S BLITZ!
INTERSCOPE, 2009

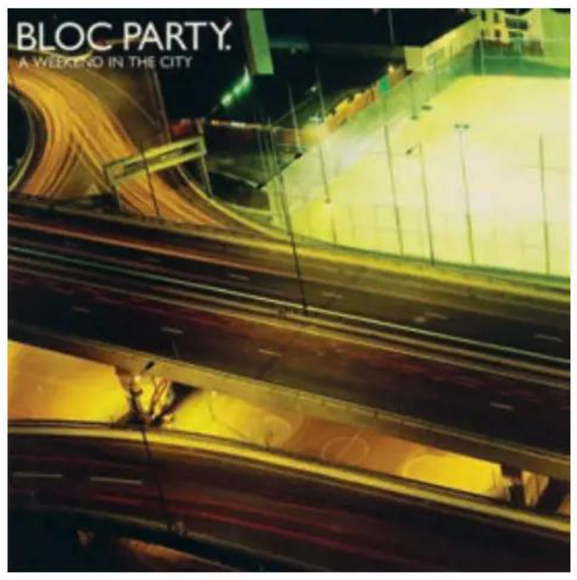
They'll probably never escape from under the shadow of "Maps", forever their classic three-minute pop gem, but on *It's Blitz!* it sounded like Yeah Yeah Yeahs couldn't care less. This studio set went electronica, shaking the YYYs' sound from torpor.

235 TOM WAITS
BLOOD MONEY
ANTI-, 2002

Another of Waits' (and partner Kathleen Brennan's) collaborations with experimental theatre director Robert Wilson, *Blood Money* suffers not one bit through its abstraction from the stage. It's wildly creative, spiralling into darkness; the fearsomely loud calliope is feature instrument. Intense.

232 ADJÁGAS
ADJÁGAS
EVER RECORDS, 2005

This Norwegian group are named for the state between sleep and wakefulness, which feels right, considering the lovely otherworldliness of their first set – Sami music, traditional folk from Norway, given some modern flourishes, but with its roots intact and true.



231 BLOC PARTY
A WEEKEND IN THE CITY
WICHITA, 2007

Yet another indie band who decided that interjecting electronica into their sound was a "development". For Bloc Party, it seemed to work; its alienation, plus the spiralling strings throughout, help cosset the intensity of Kele Okereke's bleak, grim lyrics.

228 STEREOLAB
SOUND-DUST
DUOPHONIC, 2001

For some, Stereolab reached a real peak here, with an album that hymned Eastern European film soundtracks, quoted Chris Morris, and featured an extended line-up that took in the Chicago underground's finest. A shadowy document, all pastels and lustrous greys.

227 CORNELIUS
SENSUOUS
WARNER, 2006

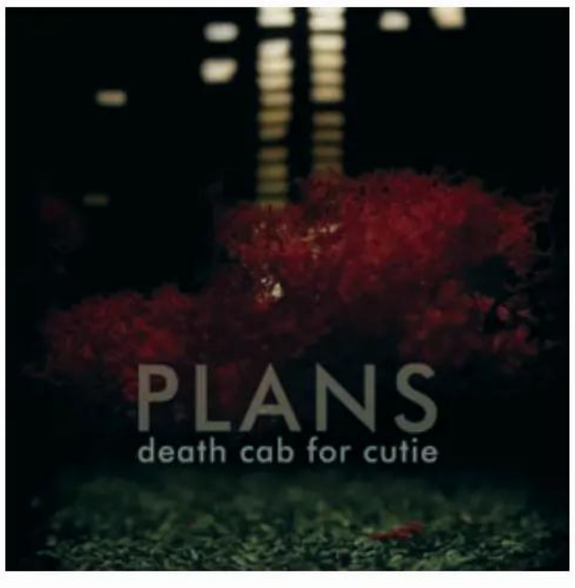
There might not have been quite so much focus on the Shibuya-kei scene spearheaded by Cornelius, but it didn't seem to affect him much. There's a case to be made for *Sensuous* as his masterpiece: glorious avant-pop glitching out, kaleidoscopically.

224 THE CINEMATIC ORCHESTRA
EVERY DAY
NINJA TUNE, 2002

Nu jazz? Does what it says on the tin. Cinematic Orchestra always had more on their minds, though, and *Every Day*'s driftwood lushness felt like riposte to narrowmindedness, particularly when Fontella Bass stormed into view, a voice for the ages.

223 KURT VILE
CHILDISH PRODIGY
MATADOR, 2009

Vile's third album, but his first that was really conceptualised as an 'album' per se – and it pays off in spades – the focus really allows Vile's melodic splendour and novelistic repepitions to shine through. Gnarly psych-rock guitars stopping things from getting polite.



238 DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE
PLANS

ATLANTIC, 2005

A first proper major label set for Death Cab For Cutie might have troubled the indie stans, but it made plenty of sense, really; their goals were always beyond skirling in the faux-underground. Gentle, confident indie pop melodies are it...

237 SUPER FURRY ANIMALS
LOVE KRAFT

EPIC, 2005

One of the Furries' weirder sets, which is saying something, given most SFA records are puzzle pieces. But here, all the members contribute songs, and they sailed off to Spain to record, which gives *Love Kraft* a blurred, surreal sensibility.

234 EARTH
THE BEES MADE HONEY IN THE LION'S SKULL

SOUTHERN LORD, 2008

For someone with basically one idea – play metal riffs incredibly slowly – Dylan Carlson's sure extracted a lot from such simple means. *Bees Made Honey...* continues the 'glacial spaghetti western' stylings of its precursor, *Hex*, but it's richer, more texturally resonant.

233 THE BESNARD LAKES
ARE THE DARK HORSE

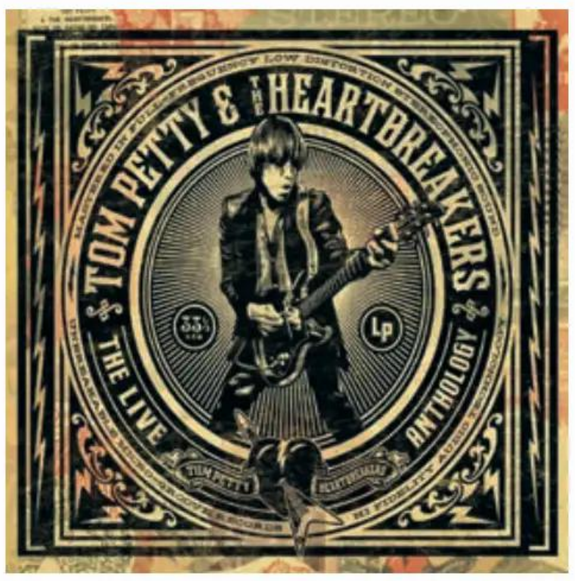
JAGJAGUWAR, 2007

This expansive Canadian group really took flight with their second set, *The Dark Horse*, weaving a set of divine songs together with shortwave radio interceptions, weepy strings, shivery guitar tones. Unsurprisingly, given the drama, Godspeed You Black Emperor members guest.

230 BUILT TO SPILL
YOU IN REVERSE

WARNER BROS, 2006

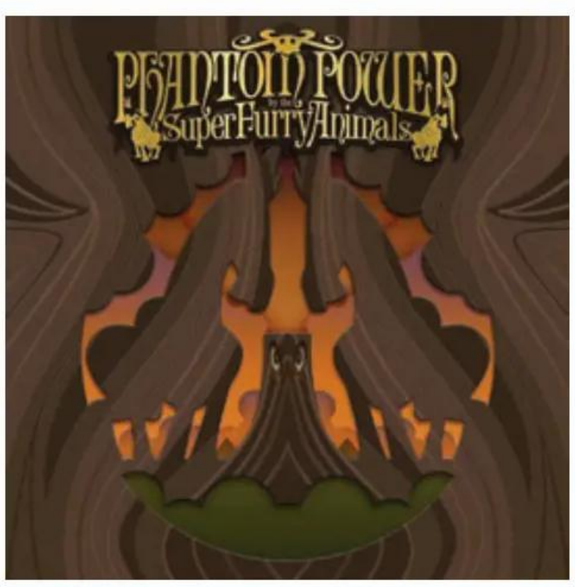
A quartet now, not that it made a huge difference to the sound of Doug Martsch's Built To Spill – his scratchy, tightly wound voice still slips between the knots of BTS's tangled guitars, though there's more space to breathe now.



229 TOM PETTY AND THE HEARTBREAKERS
THE LIVE ANTHOLOGY

REPRISE, 2009

There aren't too many people who could get away with a four-disc live box that's convincing for both diehards and passing fans. Tom Petty is one of those artists, though, and *The Live Anthology* is eloquent history from a rock'n'roll lifer.



226 SUPER FURRY ANIMALS
PHANTOM POWER

EPIC, 2003

This was meant to be a 'more coherent' Furries album, and in some ways, yes – but they've always been notoriously hard to rein in. *Phantom Power* excels for the way it walks a tightrope between concision and proggy expansiveness.

223 VARIOUS ARTISTS
LOST IN TRANSLATION OST

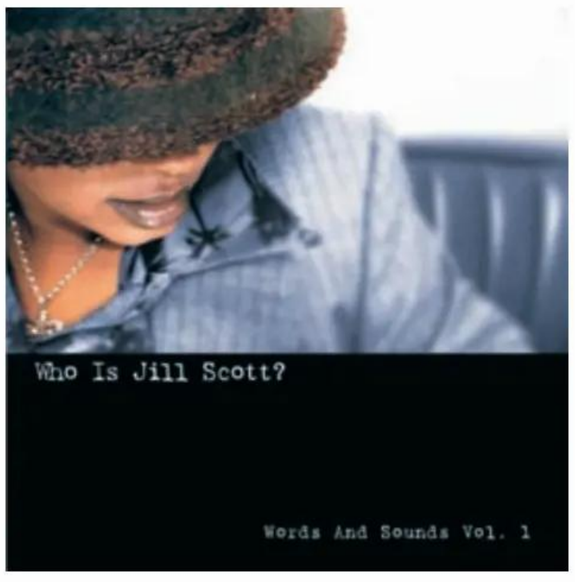
EMPEROR NORTON, 2003

The film felt a bit unformed, like a music video turned into an existential crisis, but what a soundtrack. The Mary Chain's "Just Like Honey" rubbing shoulders with woozy melancholy from My Bloody Valentine's Kevin Shields. A rare sighting indeed.

222 REGINA SPEKTOR
BEGIN TO HOPE

SIRE, 2006

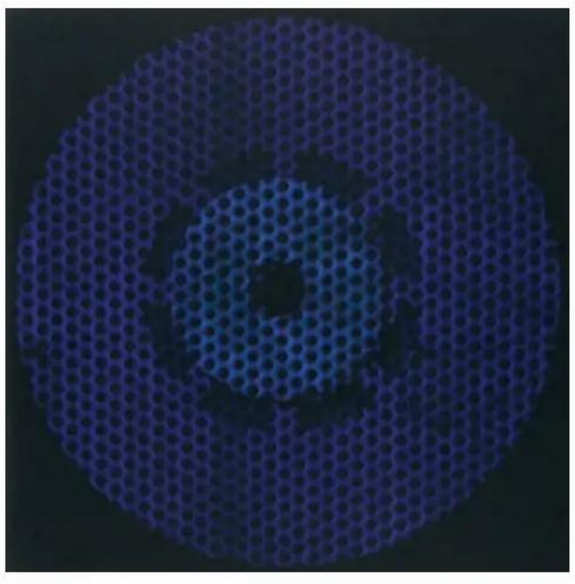
Spektor never really convinced as an 'anti-folk' artist; that toy-like, deceptively coy voice benefits from more detailed production. *Begin To Hope* allows her character and spirit to shine through pointillist arrangements and lopsided pop melodies; not quirky, but deftly thoughtful.



221 JILL SCOTT
WHO IS JILL SCOTT? WORDS AND SOUNDS VOL 1

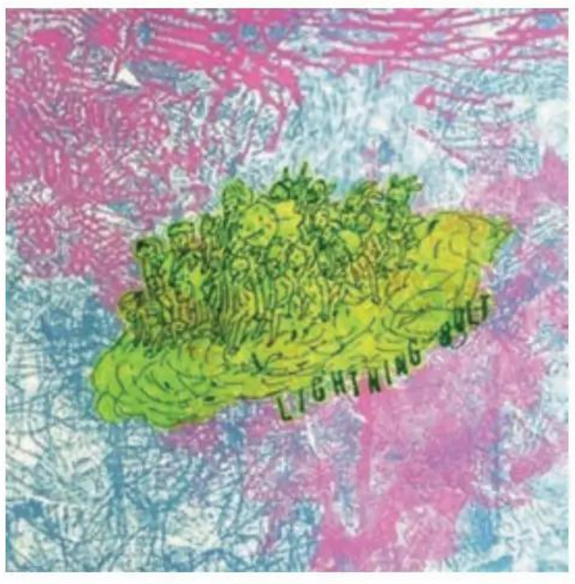
HIDDEN BEACH, 2000

Modern R&B didn't get much better than this in the 2000s. Scott managed to have it all: the lushness of Mary J Blige, the sass and charm of Missy Elliott, all wrapped up with a poet's dream-like sensibilities. Warmly intimate.



220 THE KNIFE
SILENT SHOUT
RABID, 2006

Olof and Karin Dreijer were on furious form here, fully immersed in their own world of late-night, ice-cold electronic melodrama. The songs lacerate the skin with their sheer iciness; the voices feel funnelled in from another, subterranean dimension. Totally spooked.



219 LIGHTNING BOLT
RIDE THE SKIES
LOAD, 2001

It's true, Lighting Bolt have pretty much made the same album a bunch of times. But if you're going to choose one, why not make it this one, where their overloaded ransacking of prog, metal and noise lacerates the clouds.

216 ENGINEERS
ENGINEERS
ECHO, 2005

It's shoegaze, Tarquin, but not as we know it. Engineers fell between stools, neither part of the original wave, nor the resuscitated shoegaze of the 2010s. But there was a lovely folksiness to their best songs, all drowsy and sleepy-eyed.

215 VIC CHESNUTT
AT THE CUT
CONSTELLATION, 2009

Chesnutt was a merciless songwriter even at his gentlest, and *At The Cut* is not Chesnutt at his gentlest. Surrounded by sympathisers – members of Godspeed You! Black Emperor; Guy Picciotto of Fugazi – life's unkindness, mordancy and cruelty is unrelentingly exposed.

212 LEONARD COHEN
TEN NEW SONGS
COLUMBIA, 2001

Impressive to see Cohen stepping out with a cover that looked like it took 10 minutes in Photoshop, the kind of move you can only get away with when your songs are so uniformly strong: mordant personal reflection, gruffly sung.

211 SUFJAN STEVENS
MICHIGAN
ROUGH TRADE, 2003

The concept album that isn't really much of a concept album, Stevens foxed the press with his '50 states' promo promise. It didn't matter, ultimately, as these 15 beautiful songs, etched by Stevens' soft, lisping voice, are built from tears.

208 BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB
B.R.M.C.
VIRGIN, 2001

It was hard, firstly, to take Black Rebel Motorcycle Club seriously, given just how actionably they rewrote the Jesus & Mary Chain's *Automatic*. But *B.R.M.C.* silenced some nay-sayers; these songs are as elemental and inspired as they are classicist signifiers.

207 GRIZZLY BEAR
YELLOW HOUSE
WARP, 2006

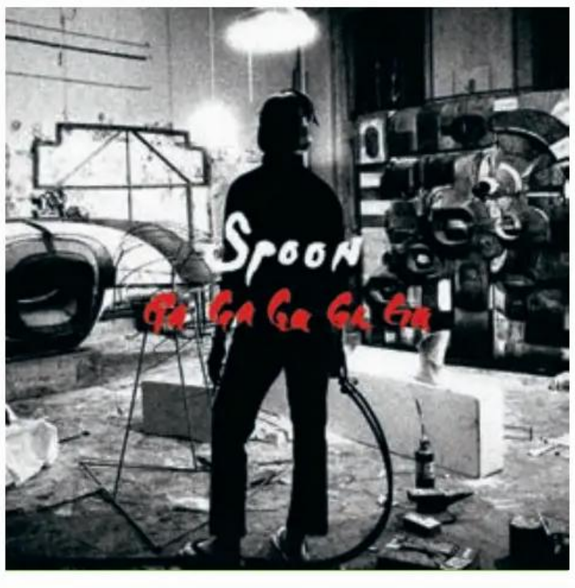
There's something weirdly vague and shadowy about *Yellow House*, as though Grizzly Bear haven't quite found their way to the centre of their song yet, but that actually works to its benefit, this vision of baroque indie-pop: hazy and indistinct, but lovely.

204 STEPHEN MALKMUS
STEPHEN MALKMUS
MATADOR, 2001

Pavement might have split, but Malkmus didn't seem keen to stray too far from his prog/Fall mutations. This self-titled debut honed his writing, the solo setting a perfect vessel.

203 BLOC PARTY
SILENT ALARM
WICHITA, 2005

It felt like Bloc Party were trying to be all things to all people with *Silent Alarm*, which risked diluting their very character. Kele Okereke's songs, and the group's fissile energy, honed from earning their post-punk chops, carried them through.



218 SPOON
GA GA GA GA GA
MERGE/ANTI-, 2007

Curious that Spoon never really seemed to get their full dues as an excellent, tightly wound pop-rock band. An album like *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga* is vital in its seeming minimalism, each guitar chime and bell-like piano note perfectly poised.

217 BRIAN ENO & DAVID BYRNE
EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS WILL HAPPEN TODAY
TODO MUNDO, 2008

Why not wait 27 other albums before making another collaborative one? For Eno and Byrne, it's not like time ever mattered, anyway. This one isn't as pioneering as *...Bush Of Ghosts*, but it trades wild experiment for playful, smart, wiry funk.

214 THE JAPANESE POPSTARS
WE JUST ARE
GUNG HO! RECORDINGS, 2008

On their debut, The Japanese Popstars set their stall smartly and effectively. Sassy, glowing electro-pop that owes something to the glittering disco-ball warmth of the Kompakt label at their cheeriest, and New Order at their most vibrantly dancefloor focused. Lush.

213 JONI MITCHELL
TRAVELOGUE
NONESUCH, 2002

Only Joni can get away with this: two discs of orchestral reimaginings of many of her greatest songs. It works because Mitchell recognises that best does not necessarily mean her best-known. *Travelogue* is true to her idiosyncratic, occasionally vexing ways.

210 KANYE WEST
COLLEGE DROPOUT
ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM, 2004

The Kanye West story has become so unsettling and bizarre by now that it can be hard to remember just how great, how inspired, *College Dropout* sounded in 2004. A complex, completely engaging rap album from someone as confused as they were certain.

209 JAKOB ULLMANN
A CATALOGUE OF SOUNDS 1995–1997
EDITION RZ, 2005

A catalogue of very, very quiet sounds, it should be called. This mysterious German composer works at the edges of the audible, and *A Catalogue of Sounds* is ghostly, as though music is dissolving into dust before your very ears.

206 LADY GAGA
THE FAME MONSTER
INTERSCOPE, 2009

It's a fair question: was the monster here fame, or was it Lady Gaga? An expanded version of her first EP, *The Fame Monster* is one of Gaga's most instantly taggable albums – it's electropop in excelsis, aimed at a queered dancefloor.

205 MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE
THE BLACK PARADE
REPRISE, 2006

Michelle Visage once quipped about Gen Z, "I love that your generation thinks My Chemical Romance is punk rock." Fair call. *The Black Parade* is a rock opera that's pure emo in design; Queen recast for angst-ridden, befringed digital teens.

202 GOSSIP
MUSIC FOR MEN
COLUMBIA, 2009

When you find a thing that you do well, why stop? The Gossip always found some new ways to say the tried and true, and *Music For Men* is another great example of their lacerating takes on post-punk, garage, disco.

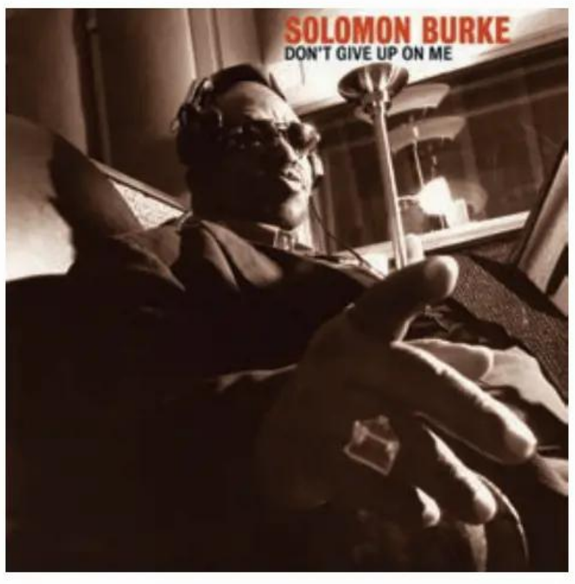
201 SPARKS
HELLO YOUNG LOVERS
GUT, 2006

There's no other group quite like Sparks, the duo of the Mael brothers. There also aren't too many groups who could make a classic album 35 years into their career, but this is one of Sparks' ornate best – lush, orch-glam excitement.

200 NAGASI NI TE FEEL

JAGJAGUWAR, 2002

If you can feel anything, that is. The fourth from Japanese psych-folk duo Shinji Shibayama and Takeda Masako was a deeply narcoleptic affair, couching its sleepy melodies in spacey acoustics, washes of Leslie organ and, on "Speed Of The Fish", "seaweed guitar" from Boredoms' Seiichi Yamamoto.



199 SOLOMON BURKE DON'T GIVE UP ON ME FAT POSSUM, 2002

The title track's regular appearances on *The O.C.* revived the profile of one of '60s soul's founding fathers. The record, in turn, revived classic earthy soul on songwriting contributions from the likes of Dylan, Costello, Waits, Brian Wilson and Van Morrison.

196 LINDSTRØM WHERE YOU GO I GO TOO

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND, 2008

Branching out from singles and remixes, the Swedish electronic pioneer's debut album stretched his space-disco layers out to extreme lengths on slower-tempo tracks "Grand Ideas", "The Long Way Home" and the 30-minute title track, likened to a floor-to-the-floor "Autobahn".

195 PETER HAMMILL THIN AIR

FIE!, 2009

Utilising acoustics, piano and twisted guitar licks with minimal percussion, Hammill concocted a chilling theatrical testament to dislocation, loss and disappearance. Any references to 9/11, he claimed, were entirely coincidental.

192 STEPHEN MALKMUS & THE JICKS REAL EMOTIONAL TRASH

MATADOR, 2008

The Jicks were increasingly becoming Malkmus's outlet for extended acid-rock jams. By this fourth record, kept focused by the arrival of Janet Weiss on drums, Malkmus achieved a playful spirit reminiscent of *Wowee Zowee*.

191 PHOSPHORESCENT PRIDE

DEAD OCEANS, 2007

Working almost entirely solo, Matthew Houck's charmingly ramshackle take on the indie-folk tradition came washed with glorious winter harmonies, stark banjo and sunk-in-the-forest atmospheres on this fourth album, foreshadowing Fleet Foxes and Bon Iver.

188 THE MAGNETIC FIELDS DISTORTION

NONESUCH, 2008

Drenching surf songs, country laments, alcoholic toe-tappers, Broadway showstoppers and the litanies of rebellious nuns in *Psychocandy*'s metallic white noise, Stephin Merritt added visceral dimensions to some of the finest melodies of the decade.

187 GIRLS ALOUD CHEMISTRY

POLYDOR, 2005

Shattering the girlband mould. GA's third captured the twentysomething London experience in shades of Neneh Cherry rap, French chanson, piano blues, Pet Shop Boys disco and plenty of guitar, often forgetting to include verses in their rush to the next chorus.

184 RILO KILEY UNDER THE BLACKLIGHT

WARNER BROS, 2007

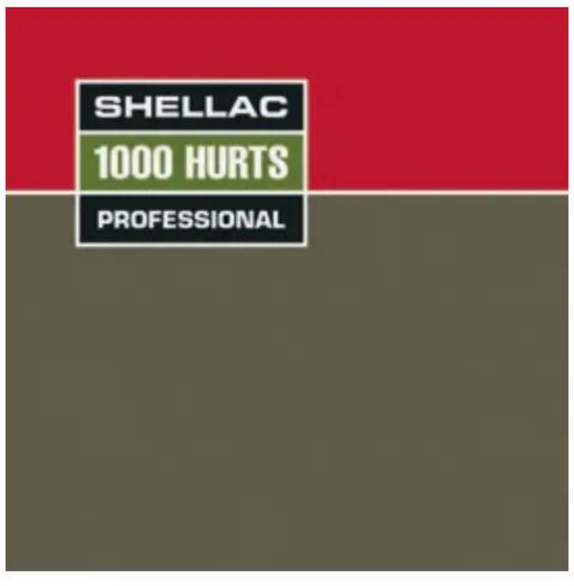
Fame-hungry, sex-craving LA nightcrawlers roamed the grooves of Rilo Kiley's fourth and final album – their major-label debut – where amorphous indie country gives way to clipped '80s college rock and bristling disco funk. The plentiful sex is often low on passion, but it gives great sonic cuddles.

183 KEIJI HAINO TO START WITH, LET'S REMOVE THE COLOUR PSF, 2002

The 12th album from Japan's free-improv psychedelic noise master, back on guitar and voice after a stint on drums. He certainly stripped out the kaleidoscopic noise bursts. Instead, a relative serenity infuses the stuttering psych-folk and rich soundscapes here, often haunted by ghosts of avant-moodmakers past.

198 TV ON THE RADIO
DEAR SCIENCE
TOUCH AND GO, 2008

Clearing away some of the shoegaze mist that had clouded *Return To Cookie Mountain*, TVOTR's third was a crystalline alt-funk evolution, driven by electro-punk energy and future rock atmospherics and feeling like TVOTR being tuned to a clearer, more accessible frequency.



197 SHELLAC
1000 HURTS
TOUCH AND GO, 2000

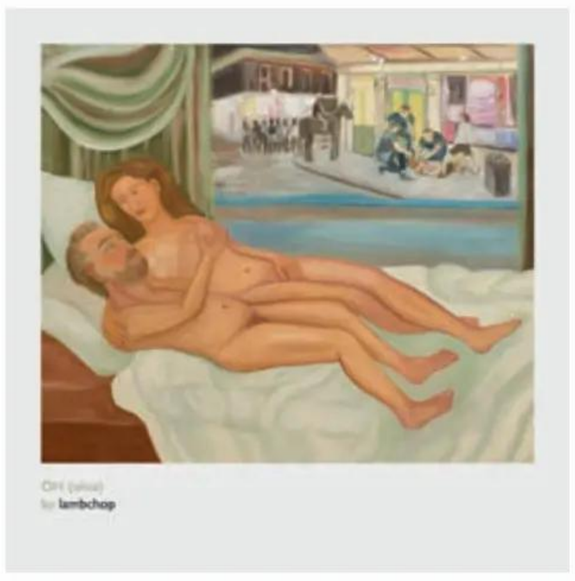
"More mean-spirited" went the official line on Shellac's third, and Albini's opening "Prayer To God" for fatal divine retribution to be dealt on his ex-partner and her new lover ushered in a brittle, bitter and brutally precise return to rocking form.

194 THE FOR CARNATION
THE FOR CARNATION
TOUCH AND GO, 2000

Sounds from the whiskey bar in the eye of the storm? Brooding, smoky slowcore shuffles define the full-album debut from Brian McMahan's post-Slint post-rockers, with hints of conflagration colouring the shifting background ether.

193 RICHMOND FONTAINE
THE FITZGERALD
EL CORTEZ, 2005

Uncle Tupelo fronted by a dustland Raymond Carver, forlorn Portland alt-country four-piece Richmond Fontaine peaked on an masterful sixth album full of evocative narratives: broken gamblers, blue-collar battles, morbid discoveries and beaten wives.



190 LAMBCHOP
OH (OHIO)
MERGE, 2008

Kurt Wagner's restrained country-soul posse saunter ever onward into the great, hazy wide open on a typically refined lounge-country 10th. Wagner's clipped and modest vocal haunts, rather than hammers the emotion and wry imagery of "Popeye" and "National Talk Like A Pirate Day".

189 MOODYMANN
FOREVERN EVERMORE
PEACEFROG, 2000

Collecting several late-'90s tracks from the Detroit beatmaker, this third album's relatively downbeat pace positioned it alongside the classic soul and pop-funk of Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye as much as his ambient house peers.

186 KINGS OF LEON
AHA SHAKE HEARTBREAK
RCA, 2004

After a dustbowl Strokes debut, a sense of Southern gothic spaciousness widened the Followill family's vista on album two. Although "Four Kicks" and career-high "The Bucket" kept their dirt-kicking indie rock vital.

185 THE STREETS
A GRAND DON'T COME FOR FREE
LOCKED ON/679, 2004

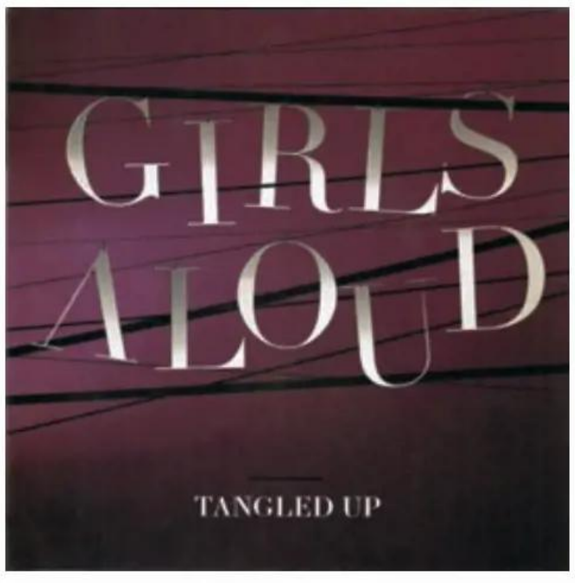
A broken TV and a missing £1k sets off Mike Skinner's ambitious rap opera of a second album. His spare beats adorned with glory horns and chopped strings, he makes bad bets and worse relationship decisions, all while expanding the conceptual horizons of UK geezer rap.

182 THE EARLIES
THESE WERE THE EARLIES
SECRETLY CANADIAN, 2004

Pastoral British folk met the hazy enormity of Americana on this collection of EPs from the half-Lancashire, half-Texas four-piece, emulating Mercury Rev, The Flaming Lips and The Beach Boys with a plush chamber-folk heart.

181 LIL WAYNE
THA CARTER II
CASH MONEY/YOUNG MONEY ENTERTAINMENT/ UNIVERSAL, 2005

Taking a freestyle, hook-free approach to the follow-up to 2004's *Tha Carter*, Dawyne Carter Jr developed his cocky baller attitude to include a soulful R&B slant, crafting a slick yet dense hour-plus of soiled street raps.



180 GIRLS ALOUD – TANGLED UP

POLYDOR/FASCINATION, 2007

Focusing their pop lasers back towards the mainstream after the genre experiments of *Chemistry*, the Girls' fourth was a more mature emotional offering with punch: witness the propulsive electro-rock of "Sexy! No No No..." and the synth-pop storm of "Girl Overboard".

179 REGINA SPEKTOR – SOVIET KITSCH

SHOPLIFTER, 2003

From quirky anti-folk NYC beginnings, Spektor blossoms into a singular talent on this third, twisting and contorting her gorgeous piano reels and laments with entrancing vocal tics and tumbles, and losing herself in the sweeping orchestral euphoria of "Us".

176 JACK ROSE – KENSINGTON BLUES

VHF/BEAUTIFUL HAPPINESS, 2005

Amid a prolific solo output away from main band Pelt, Virginia's drone-rocking John Fahey acolyte piled raga upon ragtime upon lap-steel country on this breathtaking, virtuosic fifth album of divine acoustic instrumentals.

175 SPOON – GIMME FICTION

MATADOR, 2005

Will you believe they call it rock'n'roll? Theatrical piano, cranky guitar and The Tosca Strings' brooding ambience cloak nocturnal songs of voyeurism, isolation and mysterious alter egos as Britt Daniel expands the remit of Austin's most intriguing sons.

172 SLEATER-KINNEY – ONE BEAT

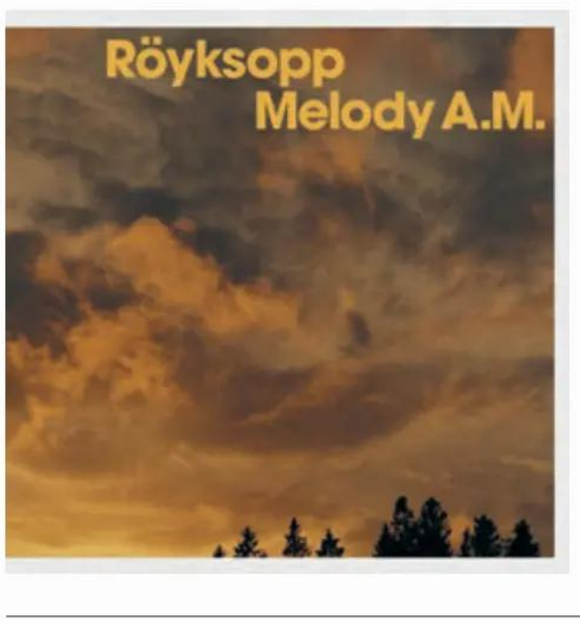
KILL ROCK STARS, 2002

Intended as a voice in the post-9/11 silence, Sleater-Kinney's sixth was a rough-hewn and politically cathartic outburst, marrying go-go grunge and contagious Banshees crank rock to polemical attacks on George W Bush, celebrity culture and the US war machine.

171 DJ SPRINKLES – MIDTOWN 120 BLUES

MULE MUSIQ, 2008

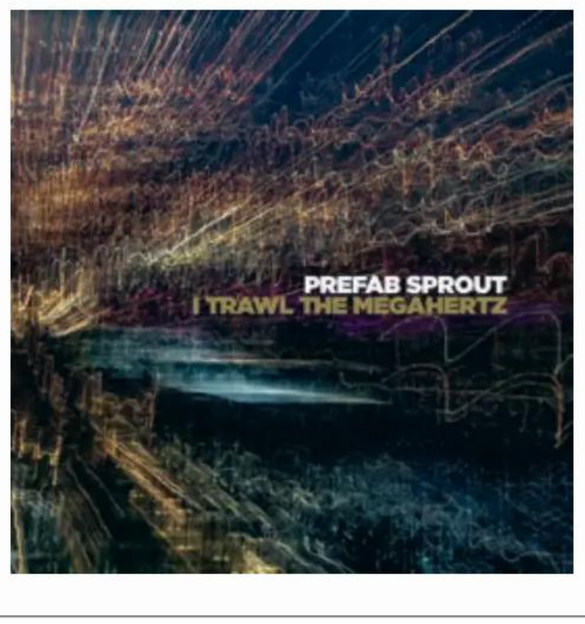
Spelling out the troubled subcultural beginnings of deep house music and berating Madonna for erasing the genre's queer and minority origins in "Vogue", Terre Thaemlitz both honoured early-'90s house and gave it chilling new context with background snippets of ghostly divas and police assault accounts.



168 RÖYKSOPP – MELODY AM

WALL OF SOUND, 2001

Hovering somewhere between Groove Armada, Air and Boards Of Canada was the chill-pop debut from this Norwegian electronic duo. As much in thrall to '70s funk soundtracks, Vangelis and '80s loverman grooves as it was to the modern cracklings of Tricky and Portishead.



167 PREFAB SPROUT – I TRAWL THE MEGAHERTZ

LIBERTY, 2003

Originally a Paddy McAloon solo set, this affecting classical-ambient work was constructed from fragments of radio and TV conversations he recorded while briefly blind from detached retinas in 1999, set to sweeping orchestral scores.

164 KINGS OF LEON – BECAUSE OF THE TIMES

RCA, 2007

The infiltrating moodscapes of *Aha Shake Heartbreak* expand to fill the Kings' sightline. "On Call", "Knocked Up" and "My Party" take the leisurely approach of the bygone Southern rock legends and illuminate a more atmospheric way forward.

163 HOPE SANDOVAL AND THE WARM INVENTIONS – BAVARIAN FRUIT BREAD

ROUGH TRADE, 2001

Sandoval, MBV's Colm Ó'Cíosóig and the occasional acoustic of Bert Jansch create warm, intimate and lustrous inventions indeed, stretching the Velvets' "Sunday Morning" vibe well in to the following, regretful evening.

178 CURRENT 93 SLEEP HAS HIS HOUSE

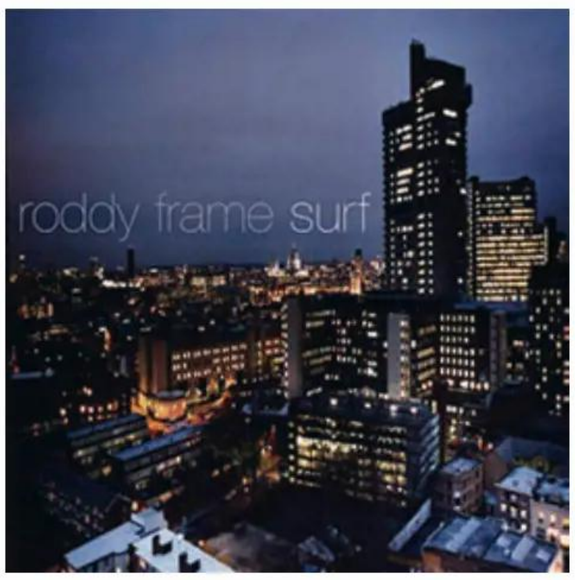
DURTRO, 2000

Midway through his transition from industrial occultist to apocalypse folkster, the death of Psychic TV alumnus David Tibet's father inspired this personal, minimal and harmonium-heavy release, as spectral as it is poetically tender. You sink into the 24-minute title track like a warm grave.

177 THE HOLD STEADY SEPARATION SUNDAY

FRENCHKISS, 2005

Sex workers, pimps, hoodrats and drug casualties weave from party to party on Craig Finn and his very own E Street Band's second. Thick with biblical allusions and sprechgesang bar-band bravado.



174 RODDY FRAME SURF

REDEMPTION, 2002

Recorded solo in his front room and mired in wistful break-up melancholy, the former Aztec Camera man transformed into a soulful finger-picking balladeer, his knack for infectious melody thankfully undiminished amid the heartbreak.

173 BILL CALLAHAN SOMETIMES I WISH WE WERE AN EAGLE

DRAG CITY, 2009

"*I got lighter, then I got dark again*", Callahan self-reviews on opener "Jim Cain". After the relative joviality of *Woke On A Whaleheart*, a split with partner Joanna Newsom sent the former Smog misanthrope gliding back into rueful baroque balladry for his Cohen-esque solo second.

170 JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE JUSTIFIED

JIVE, 2002

The oft-ventured leap from boyband star to R&B sex symbol was rarely executed as smoothly as on Timberlake's solo debut, with Janet Jackson, Timbaland and The Neptunes on safety-net duty. The new Jacko? A tag he's spent a career justifying.

169 JOHNNY CASH AMERICAN IV: THE MAN COMES AROUND

AMERICAN RECORDINGS/ UNIVERSAL, 2002

The poignancy of Cash's stark, Rick Rubin-produced fourth instalment in his American series only became apparent when he died shortly after its devastating cover of Nine Inch Nails' "Hurt" floored a whole new generation of noir-country converts.

166 ARCTIC MONKEYS FAVOURITE WORST NIGHTMARE

DOMINO, 2007

The Monkeys' frenetic, three million-selling debut gave way to an equally wild but far darker and more exploratory second. Carnival tones, punkish pummels, surf-country laments, one bona fide knees-up. A chameleonic nature licks its eyeball.

165 DIZZEE RASCAL BOY IN DA CORNER

XL RECORDINGS, 2003

UK grime fixes up, looks sharp and gets its mainstream breakthrough on a damaged yet scintillating debut from Bow's rap-scallion. The operatics of "Jus' A Rascal" alone opened many a pseudo-classical grime door.

162 THE PASTELS/ TENNISCOATS TWO SUNSETS

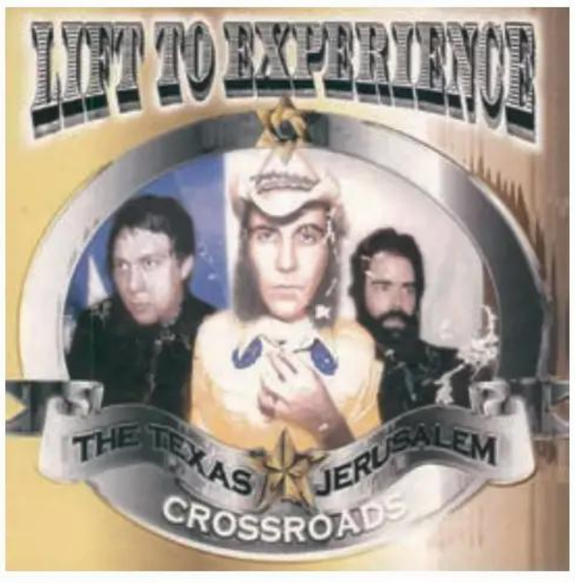
GEOGRAPHIC, 2009

Lured into the studio by the Japanese duo for their first non-soundtrack release in 12 years, The Pastels paint in watery colours while Tenniscoats' Saya Ueno joins them in gloriously bed-ridden harmonies.

161 THE DECEMBERISTS THE HAZARDS OF LOVE

ROUGH TRADE, 2009

Or rather, the hazards of falling for an immortal, shape-shifting forest beast mothered by a psychopathic forest queen, played out in a 17-track prog-folk sprawl. Colin Meloy's chamber pop remit broadens with the concept: crunching hard rock and seamy glam make cameos.



160 LIFT TO EXPERIENCE TEXAS-JERUSALEM CROSSROADS

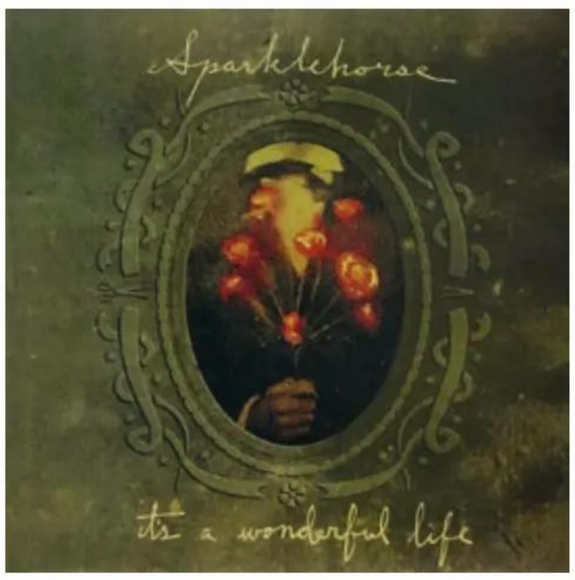
BELLA UNION, 2001

Jesus is reborn in Texas, and here to write His New Scree Testament on their double-album debut is a Denton three-piece with the fire of MBV, the poise of Jeff Buckley, the corrosive sonics of Catherine Wheel and the Cocteau Twins on mixing.

159 HEM RABBIT SONGS

DREAMWORKS, 2002

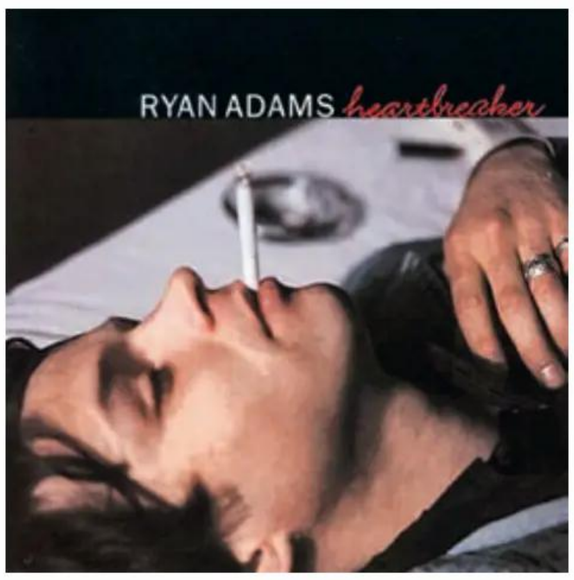
Resembling the babbling brook that runs through the heartland of roots Americana, Hem's debut was a crystalline thing, from Sally Ellyson's pure-as-snow vocals to the finger-pickings and sublime slides of Gary Maurer and Steve Curtis and the pristine songwriting of Dan Messe.



156 SPARKLEHORSE IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

CAPITOL/EMI, 2001

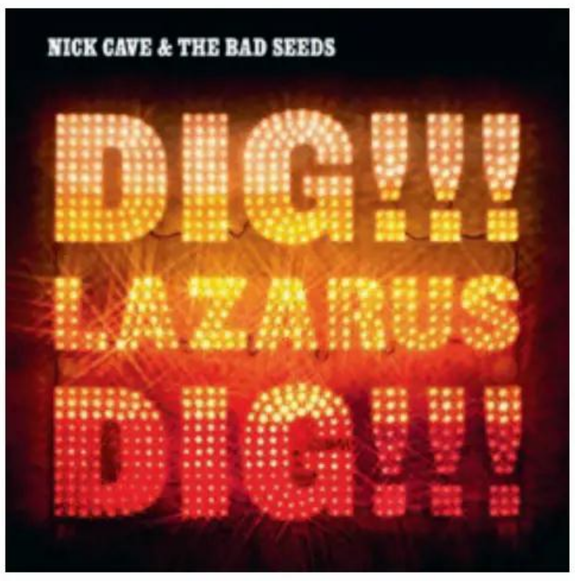
His natural melodic frailty emphasised in the wake of a near-fatal overdose, Mark Linkous gathered his first recording band – including, on occasion, PJ Harvey and Tom Waits – for a sweetly fragile third singing, softly, the cautious joys of being alive.



155 RYAN ADAMS HEARTBREAKER

BLOODSHOT RECORDS, 2000

Between moments of skiffle rock exuberance, Adams' first post-Whiskeytown collection, assisted by David Rawlings, Emmylou Harris and Gillian Welch, explored low-slung, bluegrass-flecked folk rock with a tremulous confidence. Solo stardom duly beckoned.



152 NICK CAVE AND THE BAD SEEDS DIG!!! LAZARUS, DIG!!!

MUTE/ANTI-, 2008

Lazarus – now going by Larry – rises again in New York City, delves into the seedier offerings of the 21st Century and winds up back beneath daisies. All the while the Bad Seeds hone the raw attack of Grinderman into more tensile and considered, but no less passionate fare.

151 SMOG A RIVER AIN'T TOO MUCH TO LOVE

DOMINO, 2005

A retreat to Willie Nelson's Pedernales studio in Spicewood, Texas draws out the spare rural solitude in Bill Callahan's music. Considering death, faith, family and identity in a series of haunting folk drifts and waltzes.

148 MAHER SHALAL HASH BAZ FROM A SUMMER TO ANOTHER SUMMER

GEOGRAPHIC, 2000

"Error in performance," it says in the sleevenotes here, "is like our imperfect life." And Tori Kudo has a point: long on charm, and euphonium, this Japanese trio perhaps do lack chop but their vibe is warm and tweely dangerous, rather than dangerously twee.

147 SILVER JEWS BRIGHT FLIGHT

DRAG CITY/DOMINO, 2001

Tough to follow the SJ classic *American Water* but David Berman did so splendidly, his mordant pondering elevated musically by particularly excellent playing from William Tyler. A record where each word is weighed carefully before it is released.

144 MOVIETONE THE SANDS AND THE STARS

DRAG CITY, 2003

A credit to Movietone that this stands so tall and strange alongside work by their peers in the US underground. Partly recorded on a beach, with the waves accompanying their forensic folk jazz, it's a record of simple innovation and great charm.

143 DANIELSON SHIPS

SECRETLY CANADIAN, 2006

Verbose mid-decade quirky indie, thy name was Danielson. The fine music on this nautically themed seventh album from the New Jersey band is occasionally done a disservice by the performative intensity. Still, shiver me timbers, it's arresting.

158 THE HORRORS PRIMARY COLOURS

XL RECORDINGS, 2009

Ditching their primal punkiness to plunder a connoisseur's batch of influences – Spiritualized, Primal Scream, MBV – with the help of Portishead's Geoff Barrow, the Southend neo-goths mashed up a psychedelic indie *Permission To Land*.

157 SPIRITUALIZED LET IT COME DOWN

ARISTA, 2001

Four years in gestation, 115 musicians in the making, Jason Pierce's fourth as Spiritualized was his grand symphonic gospel statement. Almighty moments like "The Straight And The Narrow" and "Anything More" would cap any career.

154 CORNERSHOP HANDCREAM FOR A GENERATION

WIIIJA, 2002

Picking liberally from the post-Britpop sonic buffet – rave pop, hip-hop, 'oos psychedelia, much boogie – the belated follow-up to *When I Was Born*... was unrestrained by genre but rooted in Punjabi rock and Oasis crackle.

153 KYLIE MINOGUE FEVER

PARLOPHONE, 2001

Minogue found a new signature song in "Can't Get You Out Of My Head" and rode it to global success as a rejuvenated disco diva with this Euro-flavoured dance pop smash that scored her highest US chart placing.

150 THE CARDIGANS LONG GONE BEFORE DAYLIGHT

STOCKHOLM, 2003

From their base in cute pop, Nina Persson and band could turn their hands to anything. That included super-slick, faintly mournful adult pop like this. Tasteful? Accomplished? Of course – and Persson's voice is a softly emotive marvel.

149 FALL OUT BOY FROM UNDER THE CORK TREE

ISLAND, 2005

A lot of drama went into this second from Pete Wentz's band, and the pressure begat an emo diamond. Chunky guitars had always been there but the varied dynamics and varispeed tunes marked a new sophistication. You wouldn't know it as a troubled record.

146 WEEN WHITE PEPPER

ELEKTRA, 2000

Dean and Gene Ween continued their eccentric and Zappa-esque voyage of top-flight playing and esoteric humour. Good tunes and some big name cheerleaders helped this achieve "major label folly" status. They didn't mean it, maan.

145 MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE THREE CHEERS FOR SWEET REVENGE

REPRISE, 2004

Gerard Way's band continued their rise to greatness. Affection remains for the pop/punk/emo nexus, which features some gritty and hard-driving moments – the verses are better than the choruses – but the feeling of musical theatre is hard to escape.

142 SCISSOR SISTERS SCISSOR SISTERS

POLYDOR, 2004

Very much what major labels were meant for, Scissor Sisters pushed a cult phenomenon overground. The brainchild of in-house creative team Babydaddy and Jake Shears were made for exultant Glastonbury shows, but achieved a nu-glam ubiquity with their winky Elton disco – this is a x9 platinum smash.

141 DESTROYER DESTROYER'S RUBIES MERGE/ ACUARELA DISCOS/ARCHITECTURE/ ROUGH TRADE/SCRATCH, 2006

Even the record label busts the wordcount on Dan Bejar's seventh album as Destroyer. Prolix even for the period, this finds Bejar's sing-song observations attaining an instrumental complexity which offered a flattering light to better see his charms.

140 SOULSAVERS
BROKEN
V2/COOPERATIVE MUSIC, 2009

Intense productions. Incredible singer – there was a case for Soulsavers as the hard-rock Portishead. That's an impression endorsed by this second album, in which Mark Lanegan's doom-laden delivery is joined by other guest vocalists, including Jason Pierce.

139 SCRITTI POLITTI
WHITE BREAD BLACK BEER
ROUGH TRADE RECORDS, 2006

Operating on his own wavelength, and own timeline, Green Gartside returned. Though recorded at home, there was no economy to the man's wit, impeccable melodic sense or sumptuous arrangements. A hip-hop Paul Simon? It now seemed so.

136 ELLIOTT SMITH
FIGURE 8
DREAMWORKS, 2000

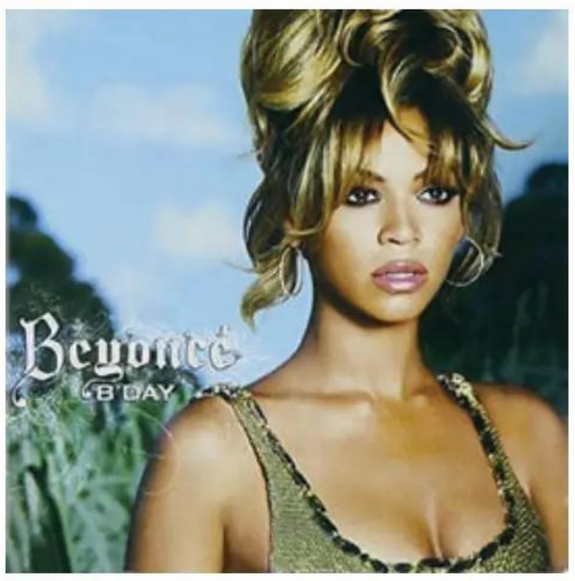
Smith's second for a major label and final album released in his lifetime added considerable punch to his delightful, bereft guitar pop. There are stirring strings, but the multi-layered guitar melodies make this a masterpiece of heavy psych.

135 CALEXICO
FEAST OF WIRE
QUARTERSTICK, 2003

Pretty much the *OK Computer* of Americana, this album found Joey Burns and John Convertino mapping highly emotive territory in stirring and articulate cantina rock. Trumpets, weeping steel... they worked on a big canvas, but it still drew in the little guy.

132 THE FIERY FURNACES
BITTER TEA
ROUGH TRADE, 2006

Fifth album from Eleanor and Matthew Friedberger. Long and filled with many a stylistic twist and turn, the proggy cleverness isn't for everyone but the commitment that the pair make to what they do almost insists you pay it close attention.



131 BEYONCÉ
B'DAY
COLUMBIA/SONY URBAN/ MUSIC WORLD, 2006

Beyoncé hothoused her second album, the world's best beatmakers awaiting her visitation. The album was lean, the singer locating a unique warmth amid the filigree vocal melodies. Jay-Z was on there, but more as the straight man to set up the song.

128 THE SHINS
OH, INVERTED WORLD
SUB POP, 2001

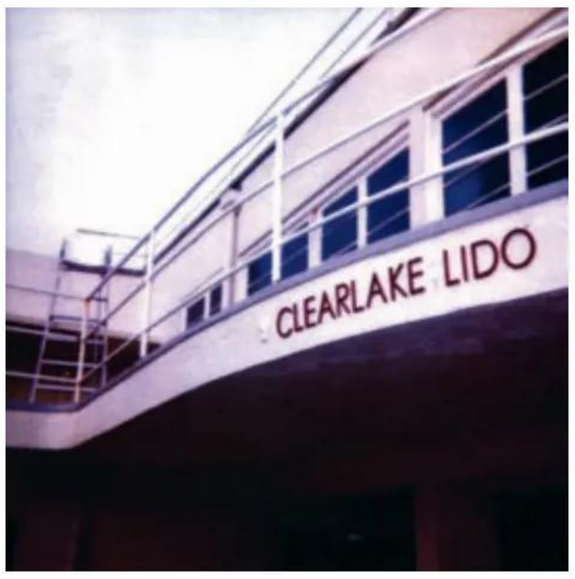
"New Slang" is your key to unlocking James Mercer and company's first album as The Shins. From today it's a portal back to a world of mildly quirky independent cinema and thoughtful indie rock. It's supported by more angular guitar features.

127 THE WEBB BROTHERS
MAROON
ATLANTIC, 2000

Justin and Christiaan, the accomplished sons of songwriting legend Jimmy, delivered a second album of intelligent indie chamber pop. Stephen Street assists the pair in making enjoyably dark confections like "All The Cocaine In The World".

124 STEREOLAB
MARGARINE ECLIPSE
DUOPHONIC, 2004

Two discs of high sonic culture! Laetitia Sadier and Tim Gane had refined their sound over eight albums, but their mission goal of engaged and motorik pop were unswerving. A record in "dual mono", and a homage to recently deceased bandmate Mary Hansen.

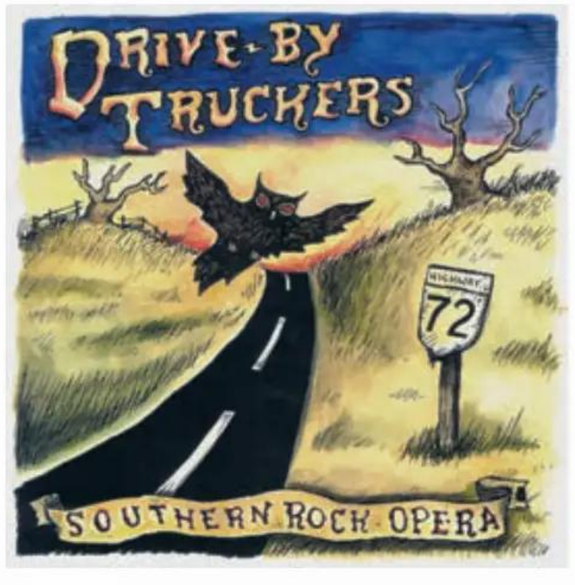


123 CLEARLAKE
LIDO
DOMINO, 2001

Jason Pegg's wonderfully clear musical-theatre voice was the engine behind this stealth Blur-meets-Pixies charmer. Hearts on sleeve, provincial ennui at their heels, they couldn't quite move past it, but *Lido* is an enchanting postcard from their conceptual homestead.

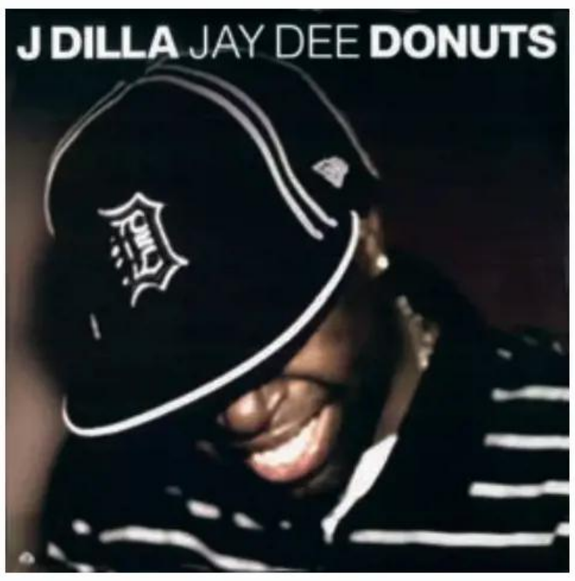
138 FUTURE PILOT AKA
TINY WAVES, MIGHTY SEA
GEOGRAPHIC, 2001

Lovely second record from itinerant indie bassist turned resourceful lo-fi originator Sushil K Dade. Combining noirish themes, jazz and delightful Velvets-style reveries, Future Pilot covered a lot of bases, led by a reliable compass of taste.



137 DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS
SOUTHERN ROCK OPERA
SOUL DUMP, 2001

A big band in every way, DBT didn't play about on this epic third album. Blending autobiographical elements, musical idioms and wider Southern narratives – including the Lynyrd Skynyrd plane crash – the whole was a self-financed, hard-rocking marvel.



134 J DILLA
DONUTS
STONES THROW, 2006

It's origin was debated, but when a great meal arrives, it seems churlish to question who precisely it was that cooked it. An instrumental hip-hop album by an ill man with undiminished talent, *Donuts* was a succinct work of sample sorcery and wondrous playability.

133 MADONNA
CONFESSIONS ON A DANCEFLOOR
WARNER BROS, 2005

After decades staying ahead of the curve, Madonna embraced retro. Retrenching into disco, the gift that keeps on giving, "Hung Up" led the charge for an album that led her away from the leading edge for some of what Kylie was having.

130 SUNN O)))
WHITE 2
SOUTHERN LORD, 2004

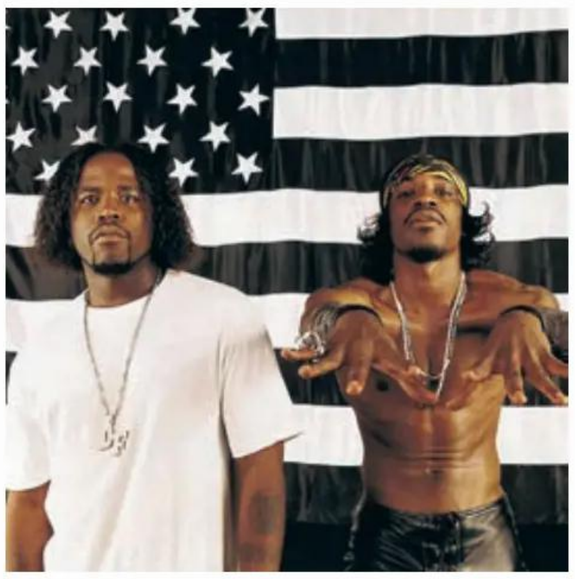
Under Sunn O)))'s jurisdiction feedback went from enjoyable sonic anomaly to entire ethos. The endless drone riffs – this was *Master Of Reality* on Neu!'s long line – came in a highly theatrical package and an enjoyably heavy mythos.

129 MODEST MOUSE
THE MOON & ANTARCTICA
EPIC, 2000

Third album from Isaac Brock and band finds them turning his raw-nerve songs into a number of evocative indie-rock shapes. Helped kick-start what became a five-year surge in wordy and exploratory American indie rock.

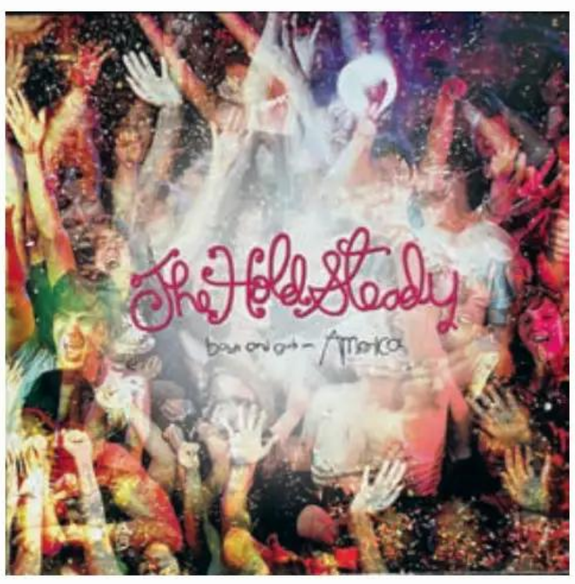
126 PATTI SMITH
TRAMPIN'
COLUMBIA, 2004

The sound and clothing got more expensive, but nine albums in, this was the same Patti Smith. Lenny Kaye by her side, Patti was in vibrant midlife bloom: in fine voice, conducting polite insurrections in stylish garage rock.



125 OUTKAST
STANKONIA
ARISTA/LAFACE, 2000

Big Boi and Andre 3000 at the peak of their powers. Channelling Prince, Jaki Liebezeit and Eddie Hazell (yes: hear "BOB") and their own quirky genius, you can hear the record's magic absorbed into the DNA of work by Jay-Z, LCD Soundsystem and Arctic Monkeys.



122 THE HOLD STEADY
BOYS AND GIRLS IN AMERICA
VAGRANT, 2006

Craig Finn fronted the New Jersey band who dared to take on the Springsteen idiom. This third album gleams with sentimental zingers and baroque touches. A dense narrative of interwoven smalltown characters and a heaviosity quite the band's own.

121 WILD BEASTS
TWO DANCERS
DOMINO, 2009

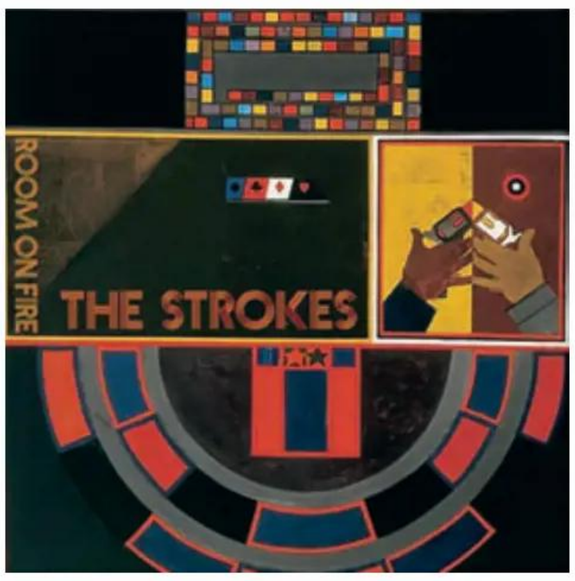
Hayden Thorpe is your visionary leader on this second album of eccentric and wordy indie pop. Catches them en route from fruity effervescence to digital sleekness and in fully formed sensory flight. A strange and regional (occasionally nether regional) record.

120 DAVID BOWIE
HEATHEN
ISO/COLUMBIA, 2002

The voice serenely hovering over opening track "Sunday" served notice of the heights Bowie continued to reach. Full of empathy and import, this reunion album with Tony Visconti signposted a vision undimmed.

119 MUSE
ORIGIN OF SYMMETRY
TASTE MEDIA, 2001

The hugeness of Matt Bellamy's vision – how about we do *OK Computer* in the style of Queen – couldn't be denied. A surprising record – and yet things would grow still more epic.



116 THE STROKES
ROOM ON FIRE
ROUGH TRADE RECORDS, 2003

The second Strokes album apparently continued in an unbroken line from the first. Lean in and you'll hear a developing elegance, exquisite vocal melodies and studio manipulation. "What Ever Happened?", "Under Control", "The Way It Is"... this was Strokes gold forged in chaos.

115 AIR
TALKIE WALKIE
VIRGIN, 2004

The *Lost In Translation* soundtrack was a reliable barometer of a pillow-soft 2000s aesthetic. Air's "Alone In Kyoto" was in there and closes up here – their fusion of 1970s easy listening and 1980s synth pop is the dominant mode of this lovely third album. A gentle marvel.

112 JENNY LEWIS & THE WATSON TWINS
RABBIT FUR COAT
TEAM LOVE, 2006

Out of very good alt.poppers Rilo Kiley, Jenny Lewis went back to basics with Conor Oberst's key man Mike Mogis and Team Love. Lewis's songs sounded classic to the point of being rescued by her research, the Watson Twins vocals helping access another, richer era.

111 MGMT
ORACULAR SPECTACULAR
RED INK, 2007

Instant decadence in three minutes, "Time To Pretend" cued up Andrew VanWyngarden and Ben Goldwasser as the definitive jaded millennials. That, however, would be to reckon without their huge melodic vision. Here, MGMT's true calling as a dayglo Mercury Rev materialised in real time.

108 THE NOTWIST
NEON GOLDEN
CITY SLANG, 2002

In 2002, The Notwist were a German band on the journey of inevitability between indie rock and digital composition. Crackling textures are de rigueur (and sound increasingly prescient) but the songs like the title track where the elements fuse are something to behold.

107 MANIC STREET PREACHERS
JOURNAL FOR PLAGUE LOVERS
COLUMBIA, 2009

An album which draws solely on lyrics left to the Manics by their late bandmate Richey Edwards. No big ballads or drawn-out dramas here. Succinct, intelligent and savage, even in its acoustic moments, it's the band's Steve Albini album – and more besides.

104 BROADCAST
HAHA SOUND
WARP RECORDS, 2003

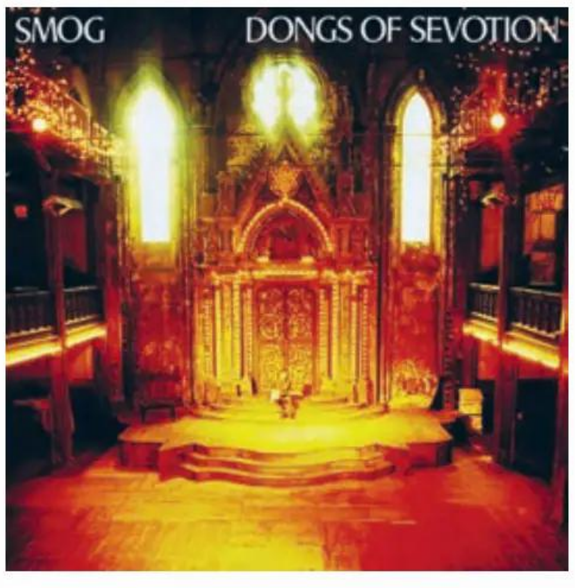
James Cargill and Trish Keenan's haunted mechanisms have proved to be the enduring constructions of the 2000s. *Ha Ha Sound*, prefaced by "Colour Me In" – gallic pop played in the manner of British folk horror – was another reason to get involved.

103 WILLIAM BASINSKI
DISINTEGRATION LOOPS I-IV
2062, 2002-3

Basinski had been working on preserving his archival tapes from the ravages of time when the 9/11 terror attacks took place. The events cast the mournful decay of his recordings in a more allegorical light, a place for reflection on mortality and time.

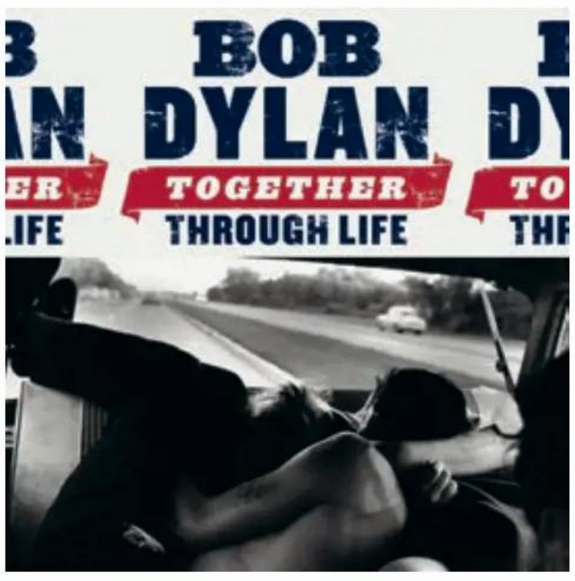
118 FRANZ FERDINAND
FRANZ FERDINAND
DOMINO, 2004

Alex Kapranos approached indie rock in a tweedy, monocled fashion – and the world welcomed it. With an eyebrow arched, he and FF delivered darts of indie-disco pleasure. Witty punk funk their general mode, "Take Me Out" took them over the top.



117 SMOG
DONGS OF SEVOTION
DOMINO, 2000

After the fully-developed contender *Knock Knock*, Bill Callahan pared things back for a tight close-up on his voice. "Dress Sexy At My Funeral" and "Strayed" were vignettes which unfolded slowly, with a strange wisdom and Cohenesque wit.



114 BOB DYLAN
TOGETHER THROUGH LIFE
COLUMBIA, 2009

The sweat runs down the walls on Dylan's follow-up to *Modern Times*, his live band kicking up dust on a set filled with dark aphorisms, sentimental song, and wry warnings. It's as if the allusion of the previous album were now being debated in a bar. Jokes, too: it's all good.

113 GRUFF RHYS
CANDYLION
ROUGH TRADE, 2007

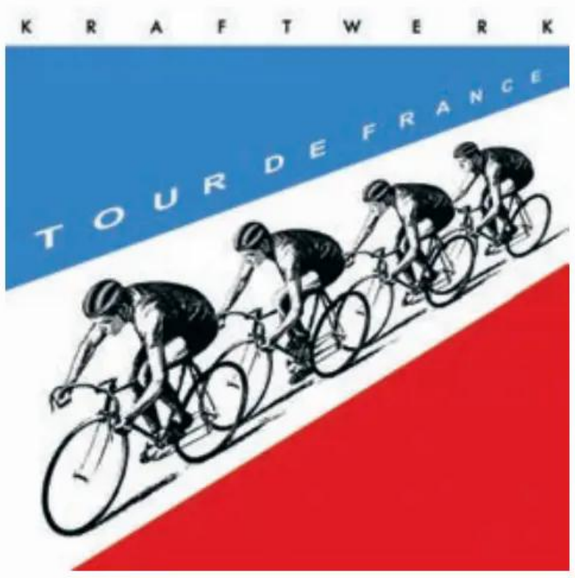
After Super Furries Gruff Rhys remained a prolific musician at a Steve Malkmus kind of level: keeping them coming, with a reliable hit rate. *Candylion* was one of the hits, "Lonesome Words" a lovely theme for a melancholic drum'n'bass western.

110 MADVILLAIN
MADVILLAINY
STONES THROW, 2004

The collaboration you didn't know you needed. Heavy hitters on a small budget, MF Doom and Madlib created a dense sonic mythology. Madlib provided the filmic texture, Doom the infinitely flexible and charismatic Wu-style rhyming. Criminal masterminds, they were.

109 PHOENIX
WOLFGANG AMADEUS PHOENIX
V2, 2009

Cool? If you could conceive of a French Strokes, you might imagine something like the fourth Phoenix album. Thomas Mars fronts the excellent ensemble: as happy wallowing in engrossing dance-pop texture as presenting insightful narrative song.



106 KRAFTWERK
TOUR DE FRANCE SOUNDTRACKS
KLING KLANG/EMI, 2003

Cycling was almost the literal death of Kraftwerk – main man Ralf Hutter had a serious bike accident in the mid 1980s. He bears it no ill will here, as the band lean into a streamlined and updated version of their late 1970s selves. They keep pace, but it's never hard going.

105 COLDPLAY
PARACHUTES
PARLOPHONE, 2000

Whatever technicolour flights of fancy the band made next, it started here with something a bit closer to the ground. "Yellow" capped the lot of course, but from the off Chris Martin established his band as a vehicle for a relatable meditation on the precious fragility of life and love.

102 LORETTA LYNN
VAN LEAR ROSE
INTERSCOPE, 2004

Jack White produces here, in his now traditional role as retrospective tastemaker – picking the essentials from the vast archive of the past. Loretta was a legend anyway, but White helped her relocate the character long concealed beneath Nashville schmaltz.

101 THE NATIONAL
BOXER
BEGGARS BANQUET, 2007

As much as *Alligator* showed they could do red wine drinker indie rock in the classic dead men's suits fashion, *Boxer* took them on a bit further. Matt Berninger's characterful dramas were undiminished, and the arrangements now allowed for clever arrangements and shots of light into the dark.

100 JIM O'ROURKE
INSIGNIFICANCE
DRAG CITY, 2001

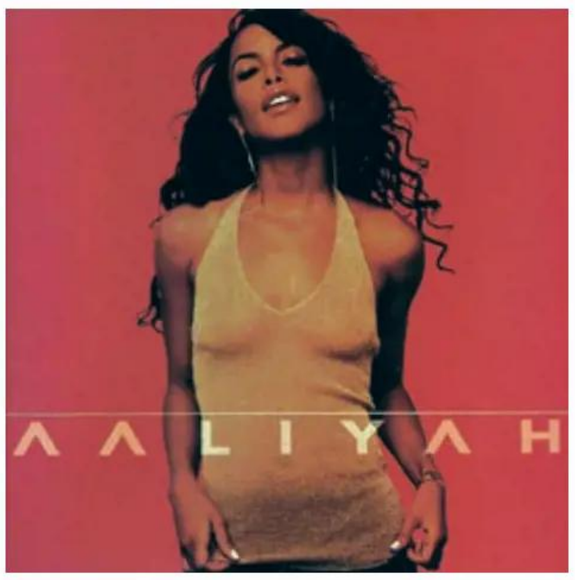
O'Rourke's time hanging out with Wilco and Sonic Youth seemed to rub off on this, his second collection of songs. There's a distinct Southern rock kick to the opener, "All Downhill From Here"; elsewhere, lush melody conceals bitter, bitchy humour.

99 GOLDFRAPP
SEVENTH TREE
MUTE, 2008

They'd spent most of the decade refining a stentorian, carnal electro-pop, so the leap made on *Seventh Tree* didn't make that much sense – at least at first. Listen to the swoony psych-folk-glam here, though, and everything falls into place..

96 ARCADE FIRE
NEON BIBLE
MERGE, 2007

There were few groups who quite got sophomore fear as bad as Arcade Fire. The pomp and circumstance concealed some smart post-punk theft, though, and some socio-critical sharpness. Complex music, on political and personal levels.



95 AALIYAH
AALIYAH
VIRGIN/BLACKGROUND, 2001

On her last album, Aaliyah stretched out from the template offered her by her Timbaland productions. The songs sizzled with a sly sexuality, her voice a cipher, the music all buckling textures and clipped grooves. A visionary, gone too soon.

92 SIMIAN
CHEMISTRY IS WHAT WE ARE
SOURCE, 2001

They never quite got their dues, Simian, given how charming and oneiric their music could be. Yes, it's psychedelic pop, after a fashion, from a similar world to The Beta Band – who they were most readily compared to. Quietly pioneering.

91 THE WALKMEN
BOWS + ARROWS
RECORD COLLECTION, 2004

They used to be Jonathan Fire*Eater, so this was their second-go-round. Everything seemed to fall into place more effortlessly on *Bows + Arrows*: flinty, sparkling rock songs (see outlier hit "The Rat") are set adrift in oceanic layers of organ and drifting guitar.

88 DOVES
THE LAST BROADCAST
HEAVENLY, 2002

A much brighter affair than their debut, *The Last Broadcast* grabs hold of the soaring Brit-rock energy that made Doves effortlessly anthemic, and applies it to songs that have upful charm, while the production and arrangements are spacious, detailed, lush.

87 SONIC YOUTH
SONIC NURSE
GEFFEN, 2004

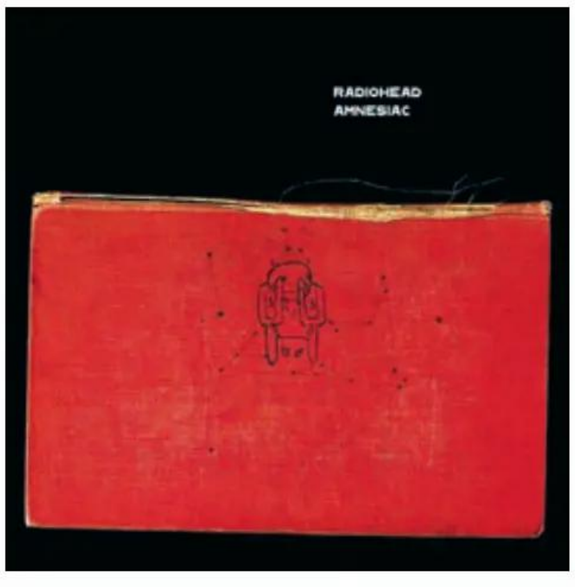
The strongest album from their O'Rourke era lineup, *Sonic Nurse* had everything you wanted from a late-period Sonic Youth album. Meandering, Television-esque guitars, dream-logic melodies, beat poet recitations, and weird pop-cultural references: here, they're riffing on Aerosmith and Mariah Carey.

84 DEERHUNTER
MICROCASTLE/ WEIRD ERA CONT.
KRANKY/4AD, 2008

If their first few albums were shoegaze redux, with *Microcastle* and its partner album, *Weird Era Cont.*, Deerhunter peeled back the layers – fewer pedals, stronger songs, more acute, considered structures. It proved, beyond the hubris, Bradford Cox had pop smarts.

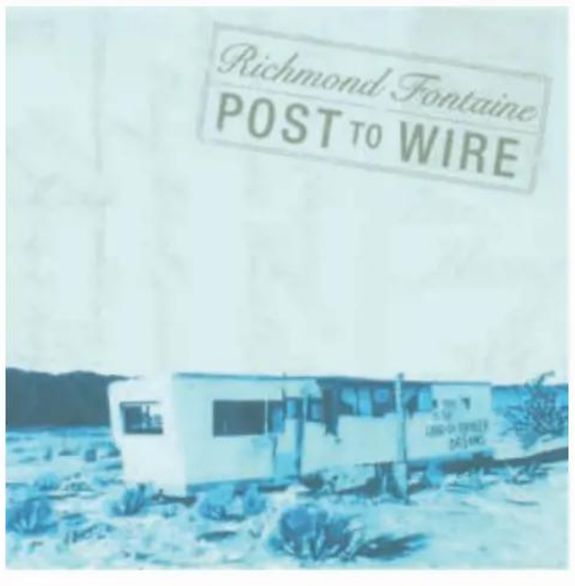
83 GWEN STEFANI
LOVE. ANGEL. MUSIC. BABY.
INTERSCOPE, 2004

This wasn't quite what you expected from No Doubt's singer – a glamorous, glitzy set of pop songs, playing with the dual aesthetics of electro-pop and '80s synth anthems. It's a confused mess, which, paradoxically, is its superpower: rich, overpowering pop.



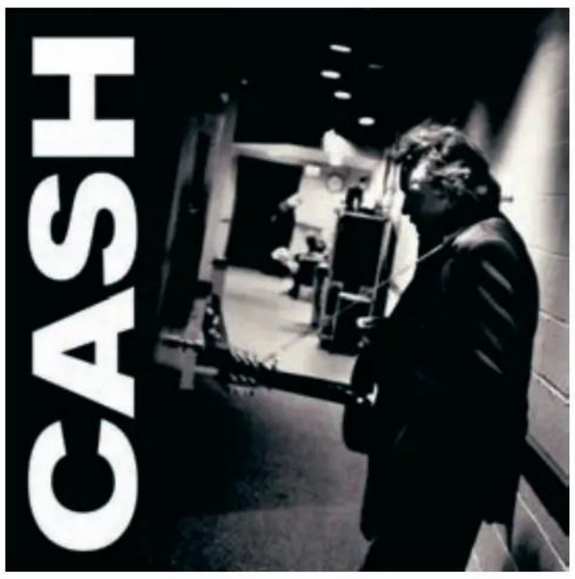
98 RADIOHEAD
AMNESIAC
EMI, 2001

Amnesiac didn't backtrack from *Kid A* but it did arguably soften the blow to the trad guitar diehards. Alongside the glitchy electronica "Pyramid Song" and "You And Whose Army" were caustic, levitational and acoustic rock. "Knives Out", meanwhile, was the best song Johnny Marr never wrote.



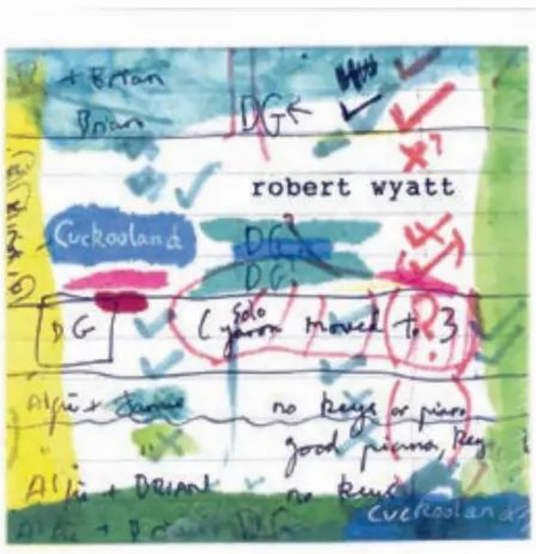
97 RICHMOND FONTAINE
POST TO WIRE
EL CORTEZ, 2003

The songs of Willy Vlautin are country-pop by design, but with the kinds of astute, yet morose, notes that can make this breezy music so much more than the sum of its parts. Subtle, but with a sharp aftertaste.



94 JOHNNY CASH
AMERICAN III: SOLITARY MAN
AMERICAN, 2000

Some of the song choices here are curious (Tom Petty, U2), but on *American III: Solitary Man*, Cash grapples with his mortality in his usual way: equal parts defiance and wisdom. The Will Oldham cover is pure poetry – deeply moving.



93 ROBERT WYATT
CUCKOOLAND
HANNIBAL, 2003

An album of several constituent parts, *Cuckooland*, Wyatt's penultimate studio set, starts out in his idiosyncratic way – gaseous keyboards, warbling trumpet, Wyatt's jazzy, melancholic voice – before going global, the singer taking on songs from across the world. As ever, a class political act.

90 THE CORAL
THE CORAL
DELTASONIC, 2002

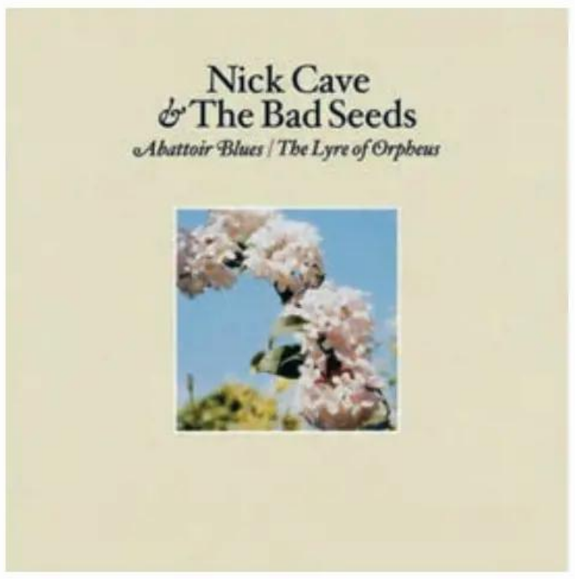
A very good band, The Coral. Older than their years somehow, ambitious but not arrogant with it, their strange psychedelic pop nuggets, flicking impatiently through the genre flipbook, felt fresh and spirited. All channels open, the possibilities endless.

89 PULP
WE LOVE LIFE
ISLAND, 2001

If you can't be Scott Walker, why not do the next best thing, and have him produce your album? *We Love Life* benefits from the focus and attention to detail Walker brings to Pulp's songs, in their post-Britpop, bucolic incarnation.

86 DOVES
LOST SOULS
HEAVENLY, 2000

Doves' debut gives enough clues about its geographic provenance – it shares anthemic twists with James or Northwich's Charlatans. They're very north-west in their approach to music, though the attention to texture, and ghostly presence, waves gesturally in Radiohead's direction, too.



85 NICK CAVE AND THE BAD SEEDS
ABATTOIR BLUES/ THE LYRE OF ORPHEUS
MUTE, 2004

It was a time of change for the Bad Seeds – most notably, Blixa Bargeld, their impertinent, unpredictable 'X factor', was out the door. Cave responded with duality: a set of brusque rockers, and a second album of melancholy vignettes. Lovely.

82 BRIGHT EYES
I'M WIDE AWAKE, IT'S MORNING
SADDLE CREEK, 2005

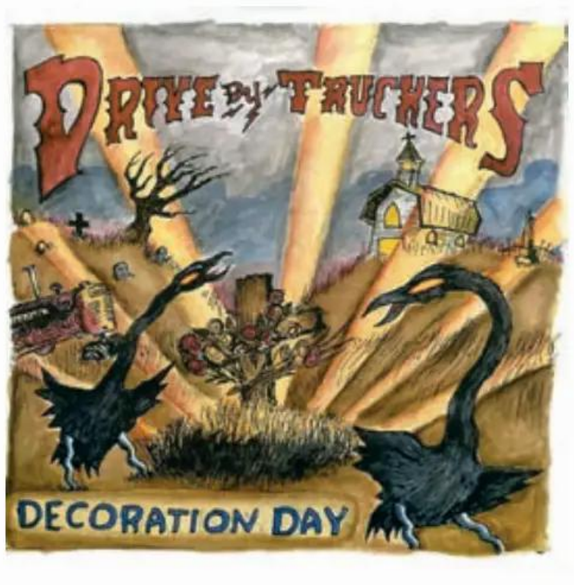
One of a pair of albums (released at the same time as *Digital Ash In A Digital Urn*), this is the country-folk collection of the duo; Conor Oberst's writing here has simplistic charm, in his patented, effortlessly sweet post-Dylan style.

81 ANTHONY & THE JOHNSONS
I AM A BIRD NOW
SECRETLY CANADIAN, 2005

From the cover art – Warhol acolyte Candy Darling – to the fragile, lustrous songs within, *I Am A Bird Now* was a hymn to bleached-out, frail glamour. A queerly compelling song suite with Anthony's self-possessed, astonishing voice twitching across its surface.

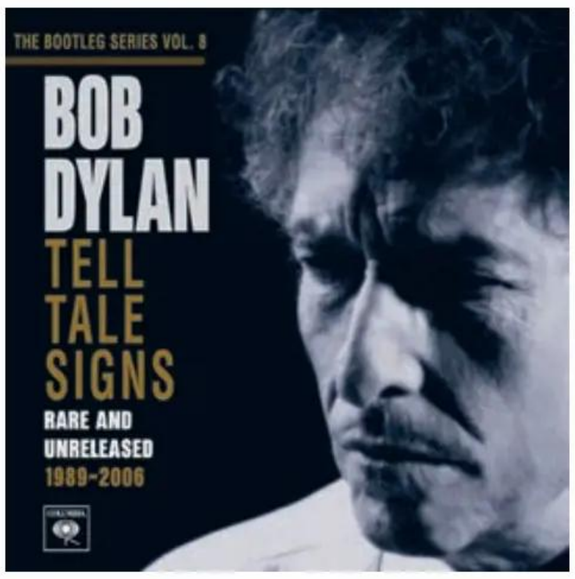
80 DIXIE CHICKS
HOME
MONUMENT/COLUMBIA, 2002

Home was overshadowed by the Dixie Chicks' political commitments – their onstage patter critiquing Bush and the Iraq war taking centre stage in the collective consciousness. A shame, as the turn to bluegrass here offered plenty new in the Chicks' armoury.



79 DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS
DECORATION DAY
NEW WEST, 2003

If you want to be The Replacements, you gotta do it well, and thankfully on *Decoration Day*, Drive-By Truckers got the vibe just right. That might even be a little reductive: there's real depth and grit to their Southern hymnals.

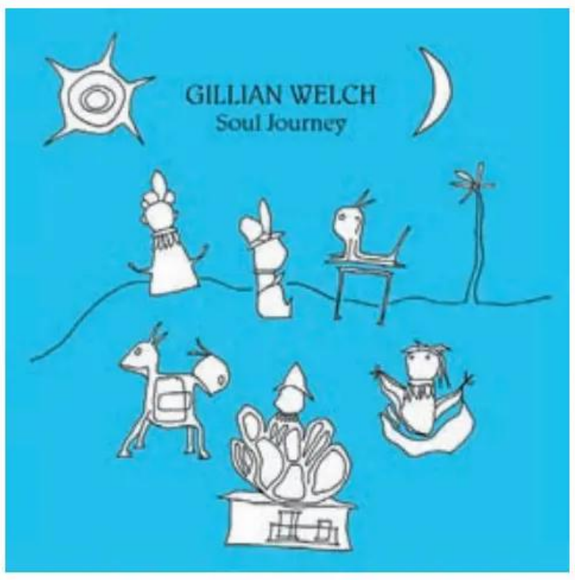


76 BOB DYLAN
THE BOOTLEG SERIES VOL. 8: TELL TALE SIGNS: RARE AND UNRELEASED 1989–2006
LEGACY, 2008

A great grab-bag of cuts from one of Dylan's lesser-celebrated eras. There are lovely outtakes from *Oh Mercy*, *World Gone Wrong*, *Time Out Of Mind* and *Modern Times*, full of pacific wisdom, poetry transcending the production mores of the times.

75 ANIMAL COLLECTIVE
MERRIWEATHER POST PAVILION
DOMINO, 2009

The album that pushed Animal Collective to the next level is a richly layered, dense thing. Much like their previous efforts, but somehow they found space here for their mercurial, unpredictable pop melodies to finally fully breathe.



72 GILLIAN WELCH
SOUL JOURNEY
ACONY, 2003

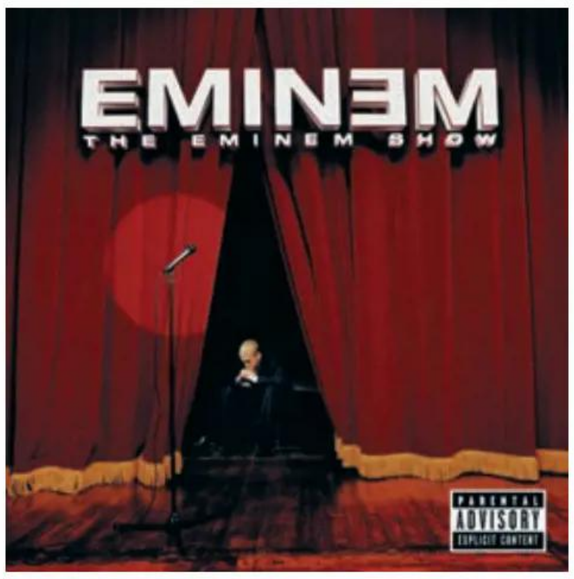
Welch's fourth album didn't suffer for following her masterpiece, *Time (The Revelator)*. It benefited from its warmth and humour, its relative playfulness, with the performances by Welch and collaborator David Rawlings crackling with inventive energy: country at its finest.

71 PANDA BEAR
PERSON PITCH
PAW TRACKS, 2007

Pitch-perfect dream loops from this Animal Collective member. Somehow managed to best any music he'd made with the host outfit: imagine tape experiments by a rogue Brian Wilson, caught in a Möbius strip. The sound of the heavens.

68 LOW
THE GREAT DESTROYER
SUB POP, 2005

By the time of *The Great Destroyer*, you could rely on Low to maintain a certain quality – a poise, an essence, songs that only do what's absolutely needed. Here, everything's more present – no more crumbling at the edges of audibility.



67 EMINEM
THE EMINEM SHOW
SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE, 2002

The Eminem Show succeeds through excess. It's not Eminem's best, but it's as safe a bet as we were going to get from him, four albums in. The rockier elements are slightly gauche, but he's still compelling, unsettling, bruised.

64 BURIAL
UNTRUE
HYPERDUB, 2007

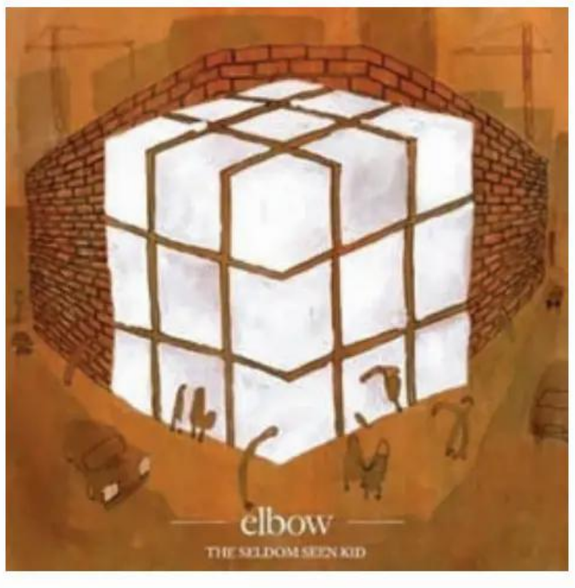
Burial still had mystique to burn when *Untrue* dropped. UK garage is still the spine of the music here, but Burial made it woozy, shaded it in TV-pattern greys and chrome dreams, a psychogeography of the suburbs, in their glory.

63 THE DELGADOS
THE GREAT EASTERN
CHEMIKAL UNDERGROUND, 2000

Glasgow's Delgados know how to flesh out a folk-pop song in unexpected ways – the material on *The Great Eastern* takes all kinds of unexpected detours. It's to their credit, then, that it never feels forced – these are still pop gems.

78 GRIZZLY BEAR
VECKATIMEST
WARP, 2009

They were on a tear by this stage, Grizzly Bear – if *Yellow House* was plush vagueness, *Veckatimest* was voracious creativity unlocked. The strings from Nico Muhly gave the album a baroque air, the better to frame these elegant, spindrift songs.



77 ELBOW
THE SELDOM SEEN KID
FICTION, 2008

Guy Garvey's made a decent career from sitting somewhere in the middle of a British pop-rock continuum that you can thread between Radiohead and Coldplay. On *The Seldom Seen Kid*, there are some lovely chamber-rock touches that lift the spirit.

74 THE HANDSOME FAMILY
IN THE AIR
LOOSE MUSIC, 2000

Five albums in, and The Handsome Family had refined their thing – country and folk-rock with wry intelligence and observational humour – to its most eloquent point. *In The Air* clicks and chimes with energy, the darkness lifting from their collective mood.

73 THE CURE
BLOODFLOWERS
FICTION/POLYDOR, 2000

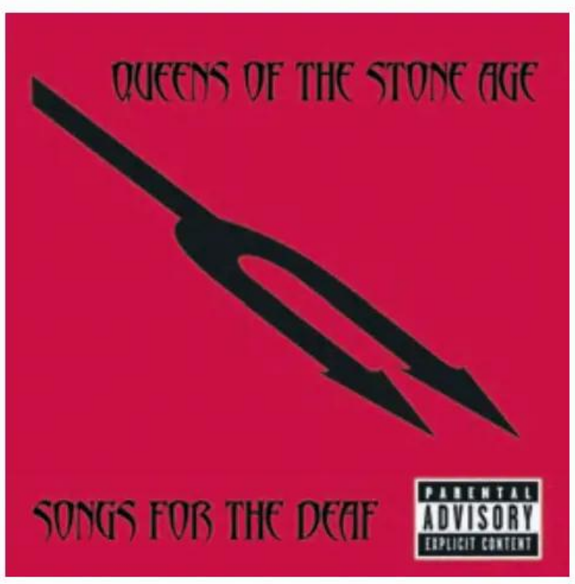
Slow, drowsy, elliptical – *Bloodflowers* is The Cure at their best, then. Once that dewdrop-like guitar tone appears in "Out Of This World", you know what you're in for, though here Smith's amped the melancholy up to 11. No surprises there.

70 PANIC! AT THE DISCO
A FEVER YOU CAN'T SWEAT OUT
DECAYDANCE/FUELED BY RAMEN, 2005

Debut from these pop-punk kids. It's earnest enough, though not without a dose of carefully cultivated irony – or self-awareness, at least – and everything's in its carefully rough-housing right place. Moreish!

69 THE NATIONAL
ALLIGATOR
BEGGARS BANQUET, 2005

"*Didn't anybody tell you how to gracefully disappear in a room*", The National's Matt Berninger sings early in *Alligator*. These songs do a good job of that, sometimes – but their elegance belies their occasional shakiness. Third album, wheels in motion.



66 QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE
SONGS FOR THE DEAF
INTERSCOPE, 2002

What a band – Josh Homme and Nick Oliveri joined by none other than Mark Lanegan and Dave Grohl. Is it a supergroup? Homme and Oliveri are in charge here, though, the songs – "Hanging Tree", c'mon – deeper and unpredictable, the sound meaty but claustrophobic.

65 THE AVALANCHES
SINCE I LEFT YOU
MODULAR, 2000

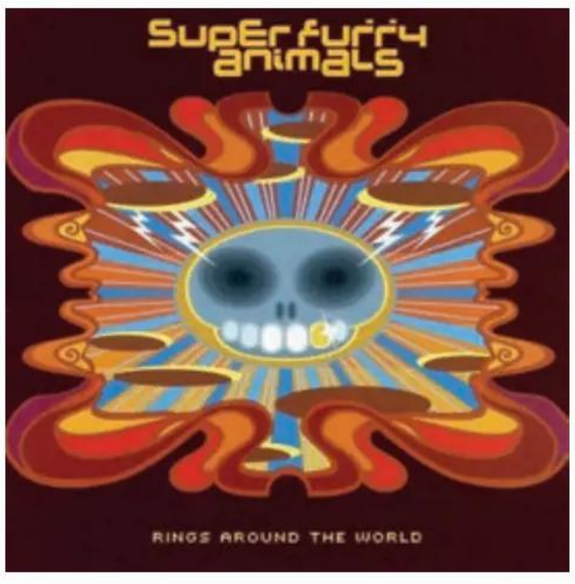
A kaleidoscopic affair, this one. The Avalanches moving on from their post-Beastie Boys, rap-punk early days and embracing the possibilities of sampling. What unalloyed, untidy pleasure!

62 RUFUS WAINWRIGHT
POSES
DREAMWORKS, 2001

Wainwright wanted to reach out to pop audiences on *Poses*, which meant tidying up some of the rococo and baroque excesses of his previous, debut album, but he stays true to his surreal vision of what warped pop could be.

61 WILCO
SKY BLUE SKY
NONESUCH, 2007

They took their music far out of the ordinary on *A Ghost Is Born*; here, they return to their roots, with a country-indie sound that's still, obliquely, informed by their recent experiments. The end result is stylish ("Impossible Germany") but never complacent.



60 SUPER FURRY ANIMALS
RINGS AROUND THE WORLD
EPIC, 2001

The Furries tended to overreach, even at their most understated, so when they really go for it, the results are wild. *Rings...* is the Furries at their wildest – bringing in McCartney and Cale; going widescreen with arrangements. A blasted trip.

59 MUSE
ABSOLUTION
TASTE, 2003

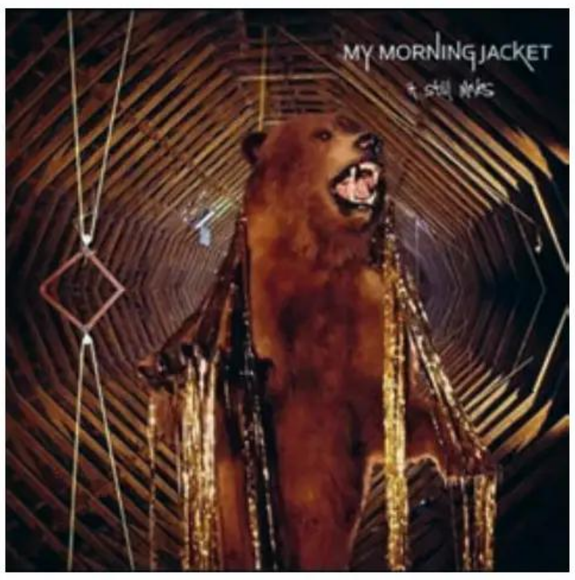
They're a band that thinks bigger generally means better – there's a reason, after all, that some folks think Muse are cut from Queen's cloth. These are anthems, then, but intelligently constructed – you bet Matt Bellamy's got a few Radiohead records.

56 SCOTT WALKER
THE DRIFT
4AD, 2006

Braying donkeys, sides of meat, the Twin Towers, Mussolini – Walker caught the scent of geopolitical brutality and fascism in the air well before most observers. Extended songs carved out of noisy, crumbling granite, an avant-classical spiral to humanity's grim depths.

55 BROADCAST
THE NOISE MADE BY PEOPLE
WARP, 2000

It took Broadcast a while to get their debut album right, but thank God they nailed it. *The Noise Made By People* is inward-looking, melancholy, even when the music gets seriously astral and otherworldly, Trish Keenan's unadorned voice steady, unswaying.



52 MY MORNING JACKET
IT STILL MOVES
ATO, 2003

Jim James' songs get their most sympathetic treatment yet here, on an album widely considered to be My Morning Jacket's best. It's still indie-coded, but the Beach Boys-esque harmonies and Crazy Horse guitars are punchier, tighter. It's an absolute delight.

51 YEAH YEAH YEAHS
FEVER TO TELL
INTERSCOPE, 2003

Chasing a great debut EP, *Fever To Tell* had some heavy lifting to do, and thankfully, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs made it seem effortless. Garage-y by default, arty when required, the new post-punk was best here. Towering over everything: "Maps".

48 RUFUS WAINWRIGHT
WANT ONE/WANT TWO
DREAMWORKS, 2003/2004

Wainwright's showstopping ambitions spread out on a double-release set of mini-operettas that's the equal of any Broadway smash in terms of spectacular bombast ("Oh What A World", "Go Or Go Ahead") and piano ballads that twist your emotions around delicate little fingers.

47 LAMBCHOP
IS A WOMAN
MERGE/CITY SLANG/VIRGIN, 2002

From the ballroom, then, to the after-hours dive bar. The plusher productions of *Nixon* succumb to subtler, more sombre arrangements with jazz and soul undertones on Kurt Wagner's austere, minimalist sixth.

44 KATE BUSH
AERIAL
EMI, 2005

Citizen Kane, Presley and Pi: Bush's first album in 12 years arrived brimming with typically literate references, domestic homeliness and an enveloping invention. And that's before the first disc of songs gives way to a second painting a full day cycle in both synthetic and pastoral colours.

43 BETH GIBBONS AND RUSTIN MAN
OUT OF SEASON
GO! BEAT, 2002

Gibbons' dusky lilt is relocated from trip-hop to arguably its more natural territory of melancholic folk, soul and jazz on a collaboration with Talk Talk's Paul Webb. Arrangements tremble and swell beautifully to meet her.

58 QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE
RATED R
INTERSCOPE, 2000

Album number two turned Queens Of The Stone Age into stars, of some weird, warped kind – there was something iconic about the way "Feel Good Hit Of The Summer" was inescapable. Rock's always best when it gets stoned, after all.

57 THE XX
THE XX
YOUNG TURKS, 2009

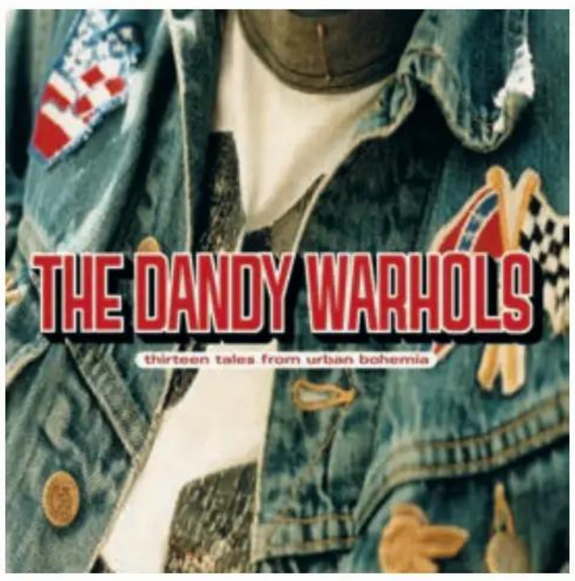
You'd be proud, too, if your kids made a pop-rock album as goddamn good as this one. The xx's debut benefits from both the energy of youth and a sussed understanding that it's never a good idea to overegg things.

54 ROBYN
ROBYN
KONICHIWA, 2005

Swedish modern disco icon Robyn has a knack for catching the moment just after heartbreak and turning it into dancefloor gold. Here, "With Every Heartbeat" does the job best – electro dance-pop was rarely so intimately aware of love's easy tears.

53 BLUR
THINK TANK
PARLOPHONE, 2003

It took Blur a while to make their 'difficult' album (they'd done their Kinks album, their Britpop one, etc) – *Think Tank* came after, a sort of unilateral disarmament. With Graham Coxon out of the way, Albarn's on free-associative form here, coming into wonderful voice.



50 THE DANDY WARHOLS
THIRTEEN TALES FROM URBAN BOHEMIA
CAPITOL, 2000

The free-living Portland four-piece concoct their most direct, haze-free clutch of boho rock hooks and blissed-out pop trips. "Bohemian Like You" is the monster radio hit, "Godless" and "The Gospel" the dope-dappled highs.

49 DAFT PUNK
DISCOVERY
VIRGIN, 2001

The '80s revival begins in earnest as Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo don the robot masks and revisit the memories and music of their youths in the shape of global glam-disco smashes infused with New York electropop and R&B.

46 LCD SOUNDSYSTEM
LCD SOUNDSYSTEM
DFA/CAPITOL, 2005

"*I'm losing my edge*", James Murphy grumbled, while simultaneously finding it. LCD's debut defined the electronic leftfield of the early-'oos NYC explosion: dropping all the coolest scenester names (Daft Punk, Can, Suicide, This Heat) but creating a corroded electro-funk zeitgeist of its own.

45 OUTKAST
SPEAKERBOXX/ THE LOVE BELOW
ARISTA, 2003

Musical differences in action. Big Boi and André 3000 take separate solo halves of a two-album set, the first to double down on *Stankonia*'s Southern rap brilliance, the second to become the next Prince and give the world "Hey Ya!".

42 VAMPIRE WEEKEND
VAMPIRE WEEKEND
XL, 2008

The New York collegiate crowd discover Peter Gabriel and *Graceland*. Enter an infectious hybrid of new wave indie pop and Afrobeat, causing a highlife rumpus on campus on "Walcott", "Oxford Comma" and the hyperactive "A Punk".

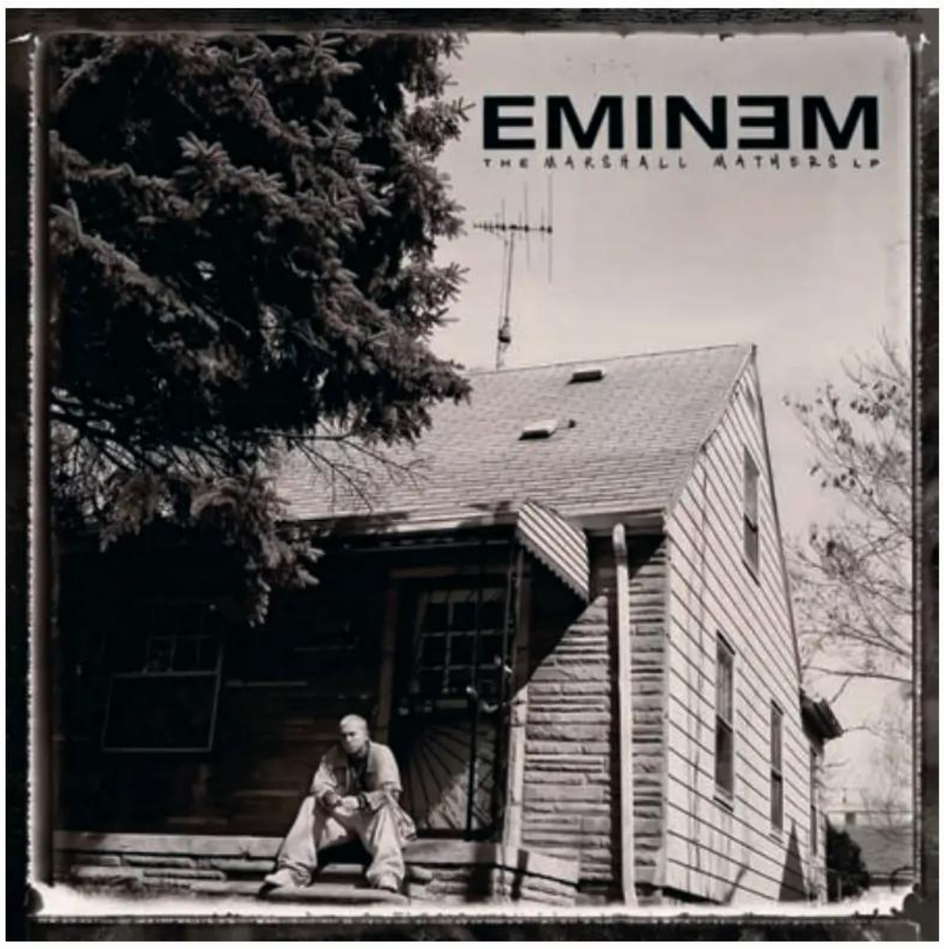
41 GOLDFRAPP
FELT MOUNTAIN
MUTE, 2000

What if Shirley Bassey had soundtracked *Moonraker*? Just one question the London retro-electro duo set out to answer on a cinematic, sci-fi-infused debut that modernised '60s thriller soundtracks, cabaret and folk.

GERARD
Gerard
Gerard
Dichen
Horsley
Sevenoaks
Sevenoaks
Sevenoaks

38 BJÖRK
VESPERTINE
ONE LITTLE INDIAN, 2001

Born from a new romance and a more intimate domestic focus, Björk's fourth album is arguably her most personal, and certainly one of her most musically rich, a winter wonderland of sparkle and chime, sensuality and eroticism. Wreathed in ethereal strings and celestial choirs, frost-crackling electro-folk lullabies like "Hidden Place" and "It's Not Up To You" have a luminous, swirling, magical beauty. *Vespertine* postively throbs with ecstatic sexual lust, especially "Pagan Poetry", a blissed-out love song to Björk's new partner Matthew Barney which was banned from MTV for its naked nipples and orgasmic euphoria. Alas, the relationship did not last but these chamber-pop miniatures have barely dated. ***STEPHEN DALTON***

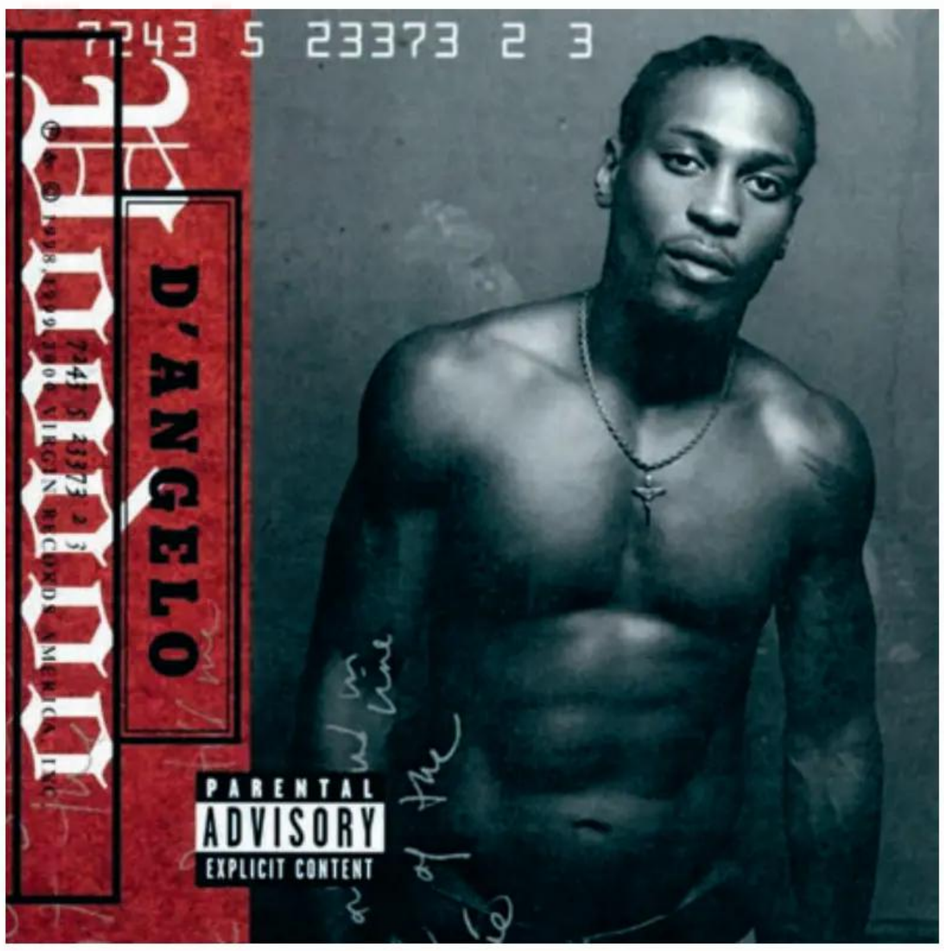


37 EMINEM
THE MARSHALL MATHERS LP
INTERSCOPE/AFTERMATH ENTERTAINMENT, 2000

By turns exhilarating and repulsive, Eminem both celebrated and excoriated his new-found pop supervillain status on this ferociously profane, wilfully offensive, huge-selling third. The Detroit rapper displays his super-dextrous verbal skills and piercingly self-aware humour on monster hits like "The Way I Am" and "The Real Slim Shady", all bouncing along on Doctor Dre's catchy, hook-laden, surprisingly nimble production. The big left-field surprise here is Dido-sampling ballad "Stan", a psychologically complex mini-movie about a stalker-fan, which became a pop-culture byword. If you can tolerate the homophobia and misogyny, including lurid fantasies of murder and incest, Mathers is undeniably a sicko genius. ***STEPHEN DALTON***

34 JOANNA NEWSOM
THE MILK-EYED MENDER
DRAG CITY, 2004

Literary types like to talk of 'new voices' – and if anyone ever fitted that bill in music it was Joanna Newsom in 2004. Accompanied by that never-knowingly rock'n'roll of instruments, the harp, her childlike delivery of these dozen folk and bluegrass-informed sketches still sounds spellbinding. Yet those arresting sonic textures populate neatly turned, hook-framed folk-pop compositions such as "The Book Of Right-On" and "Sadie" as well as pithy Americana ditties such as the sassy piano riposte "Inflammatory Writ" and whimsical "Clam, Crab, Cockle, Cowrie". All of which continue to ensure this album will always outlive any fleeting novelty value. ***JOHNNY SHARP***



33 D'ANGELO
VOODOO VIRGIN, 2000

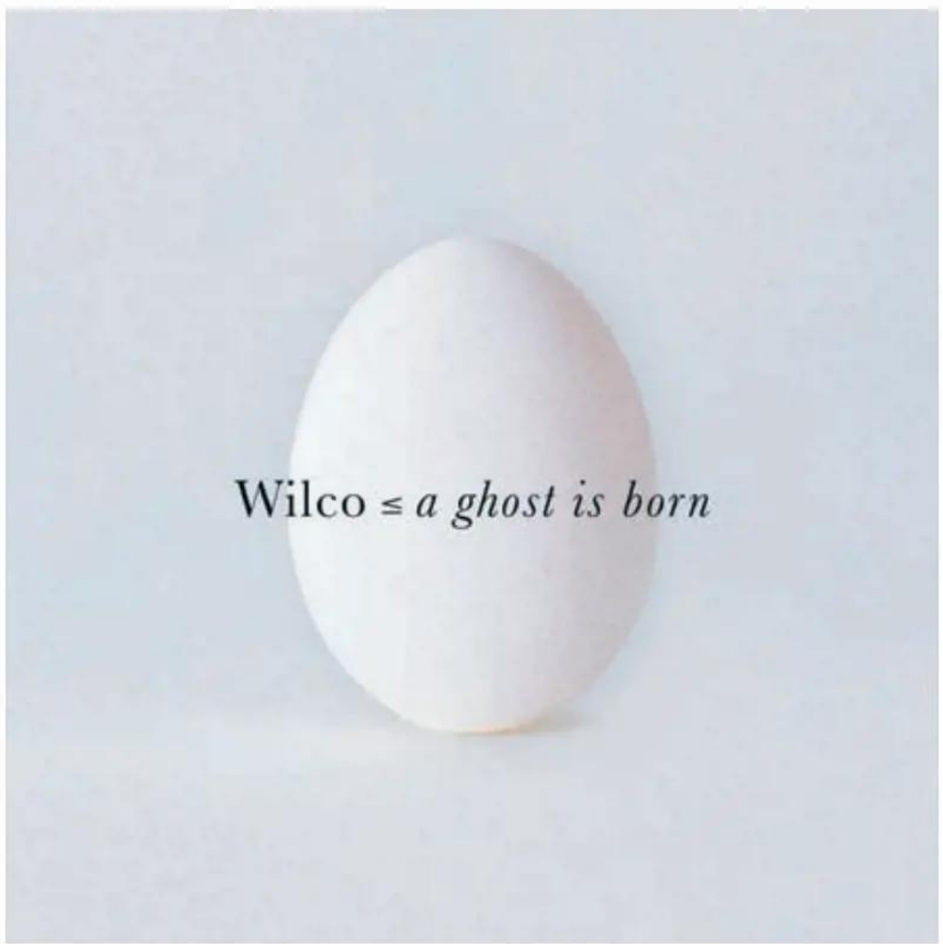
The album that transformed Michael "D'Angelo" Archer into a million-selling, Grammy-winning, chart-topping nu-soul icon plays like a deluxe masterclass in African-American pop history. Mostly recorded at Jimi Hendrix's former studio Electric Lady, *Voodoo* features R&B royalty including Questlove, DJ Premier, Method Mad, Redman, Erykah Badu, J Dilla and Q Tip. Rich, funky, warm and organic, this is classic analogue soul with 21st century trip-hop trimmings. Alongside unabashed nods to Marvin Gaye on gorgeous falsetto ballads like "Send It On", a powerful Prince influence also prevails. Smoochy smash hit "Untitled (How Does It Feel)", complete with highly eroticised video, made Archer a reluctant but hugely successful sex symbol. ***STEPHEN DALTON***

32 GRANDADDY
THE SOPHTWARE SLUMP
V2, 2000

A fertile fusion of rustic alt.country, widescreen electro-rock and millennial techno-angst, Grandaddy's second marked a great leap forward for Jason Lytle, who composed and recorded the entire project alone in a remote Montana farmhouse. Right from his epic three-part opener "He's Simple, He's Dumb, He's The Pilot", an eight-minute mini-symphony of cosmic Americana, Lytle is shooting for distant horizons and novelistic emotions. The fuzzy-warm chugger "The Crystal Lake" proved Grandaddy could also handle post-grunge pop with ease, but most of these darkly humorous sci-fi lullabies are agreeably experimental, earning thematic and sonic comparisons with Radiohead's *OK, Computer*. ***STEPHEN DALTON***

31 PJ HARVEY
WHITE CHALK
ISLAND, 2007

This was most exposed PJ Harvey album yet: the songs mainly self-accompanied, sung at the very top of her register, the lyrics on songs like "When Under Ether" exploring human vulnerability like a medical textbook. Still, her seventh album was conceptually and creatively her toughest yet. Returned from the thematic America she inhabited in Stories *From The City, Stories From The Sea* five years previously, Harvey replanted herself in British soil: musty piano, censorious others, bats in the belfry. A devastating album, still echoing in Harvey's work years later.
JOHN ROBINSON

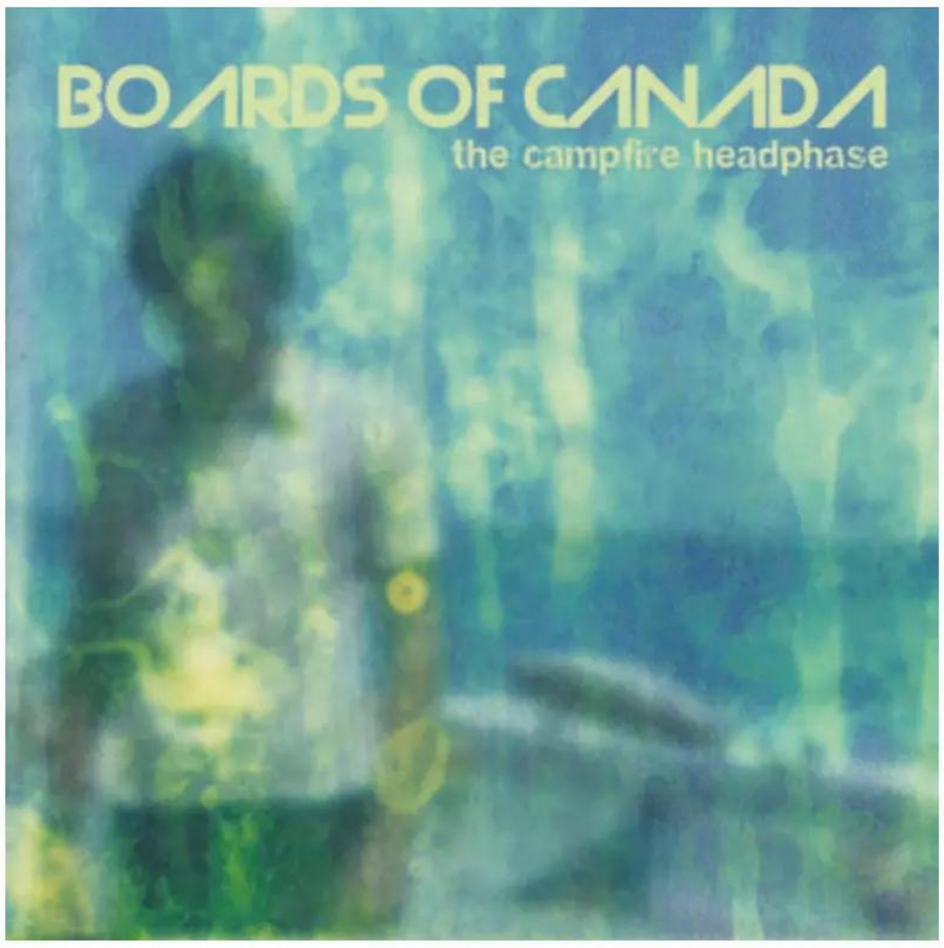


28 WILCO
A GHOST IS BORN
NONESUCH, 2004

As angular and awkward as it is soft and welcoming, *A Ghost Is Born* saw Jeff Tweedy respond to the success of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* with some of Wilco's greatest songs – "Handshake Drugs", "The Late Greats", "Hummingbirds". But he also wrote a guitar solo that represented a panic attack on "At Least That's What You Said" while the middle section of the 15-minute "Less Than You Think" was intended to sound like a migraine. It's that sort of album, beautiful but occasionally wishing that it isn't – a record that wants to keep the listener at arm's length but ends up sweeping them into a warm embrace. ***PETER WATTS***

27 ROBERT PLANT AND ALISON KRAUSS
RAISING SAND
ROUNDER RECORDS, 2007

Stripped back as stripped back was meant to sound, *Raising Sand* reconnected its stars with the grit from which decades of success had served to separate them. With T Bone Burnett at the helm, a tight band of 12 top-flight musicians behind them, Plant and Krauss put ego aside to become an infinitely sensitive, tightly harmonising Americana jukebox musical. Among the selections: 1950s rock'n'roll, R&B, Gene Clark and Townes Van Zandt... even Page & Plant's "Please Read The Letter". The carbon date of a song was unimportant; the story it had to tell was everything.
JOHN ROBINSON



30 BOARDS OF CANADA
THE CAMPFIRE HEADPHASE
WARP, 2005

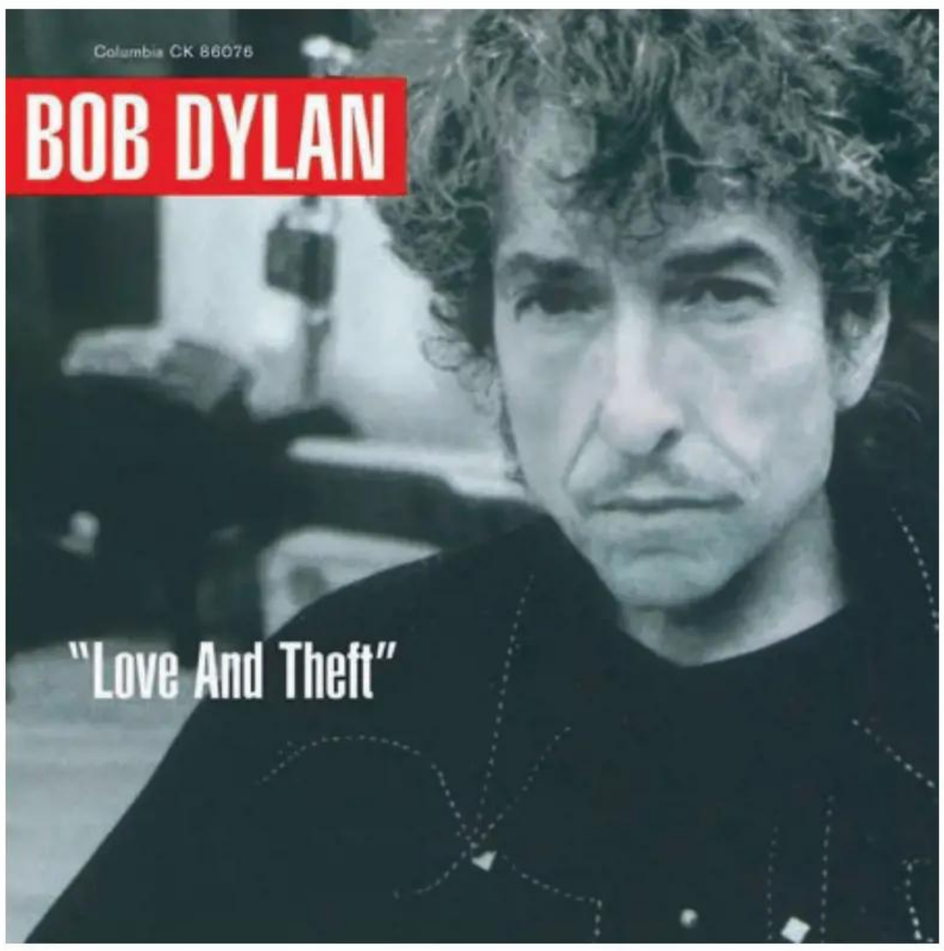
Having established a signature sound very much their own, the Scottish sibling duo naturally sought to reshape it on this third album, relying less heavily on samples and introducing more traditional instrumentation (well, guitars, mainly) into the mix. It still makes for another utterly transportative hour, though, dotted with half-remembered riffs, passing musical traffic and echoes of distant movie scores.
The slow strum of "Satellite Anthem Icarus" and the gorgeous wistful drift of "Peacock Tail" edges them closer to conventional soundtrack fare but it also makes for a more even listen. Music that's just kissed goodnight to its children, if you will. ***JOHNNY SHARP***

29 CAT POWER
THE GREATEST
MATADOR, 2006

Keeping her perennial penchant for cover versions in check, Chan Marshall resolved to make this seventh studio album her first all-original affair, and decamped to Memphis with a stellar, Wrecking Crew-style squad of seasoned instrumentalists in tow. The latter contribute gorgeously dusty organ, languid piano and swaggering sax to Marshall's alluringly smoky but charismatic tones, dressing songs such as "After It All" and "Willie" in casually timeless style while still retaining an emotional essence that seeps into the soul. Meanwhile on songs such as "Hate" she can still peel away the layers to offer raw, piercing indie songcraft. Win-win.
JOHNNY SHARP

26 BROADCAST
TENDER BUTTONS
WARP, 2005

A visionary team, Trish Keenan and James Cargill could coax the humanity from a circuit board and melody from the harshest static. By this third album, the band had moved from an inspirational synthesis of expensive avant-garde records into a timeless and political electronic pop. Tunes like "America's Boy" were standout melodies amid the analogue sizzle but as time passes the music reveals the originality of Keenan's lyrics – *"Awkwardness/Happening to someone you love..."* – as one of the decade's concealed treasures warranting more investigation.
JOHN ROBINSON



25 BOB DYLAN
"LOVE AND THEFT"
COLUMBIA, 2001

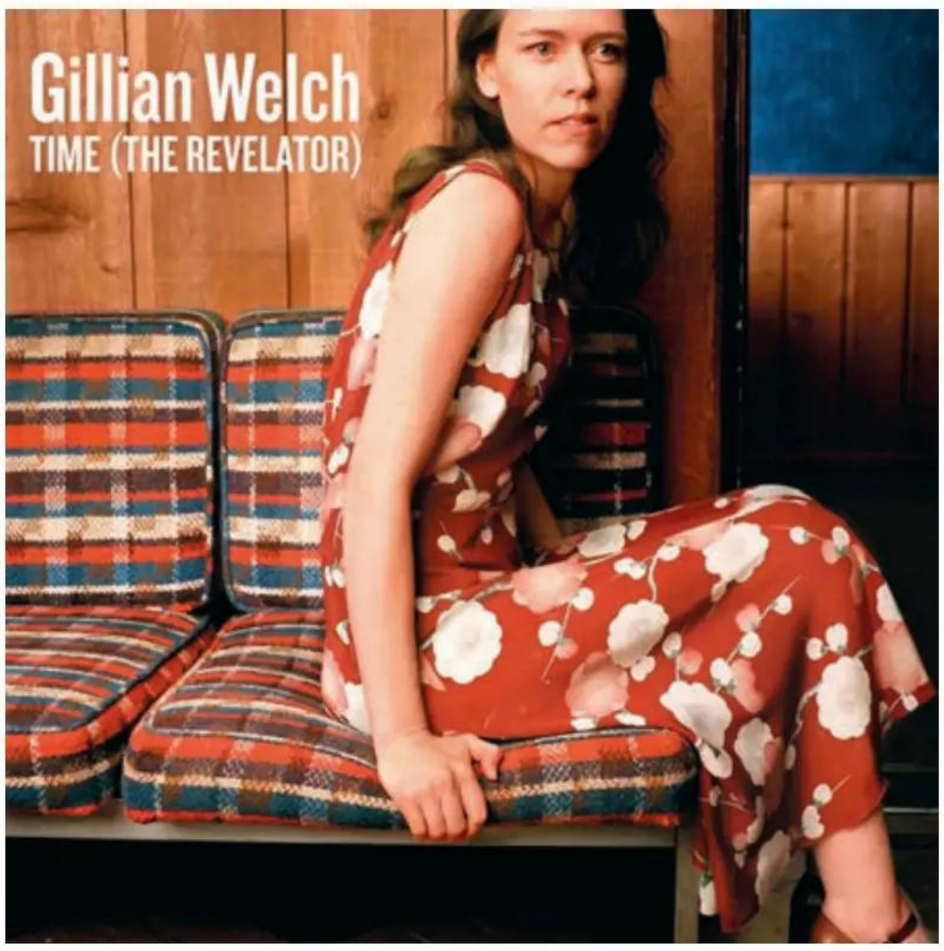
Bob took his well-travelled live band into the studio and emerged with a masterpiece, confirming the revival of *Time Out Of Mind* was not burnt out. In under a fortnight, the group knocked out half-a-dozen modern classics – rollicking opener "Tweedle Dee And Tweedle Dum", "Mississippi", "High Water (For Charley Patton)", "Po' Boy" for starters – that traced a fluid line through American musical traditions from folk to jazz while finessing the boogie-soaked jump blues that would provide a template for most of Dylan's albums until *Shadows In The Night*. The central theme is America itself – its history, culture, contradictions, mystique, mistakes. It was released on September 11, 2001 into a new world entirely. ***PETER WATTS***

24 BOARDS OF CANADA
GEOGADDI
WARP, 2002

If you retreated to the Pentland Hills in Scotland to write an album, you might come up with something correspondingly bucolic. Not so the Sandison brothers, who returned there to follow up 1998's acclaimed *Music Has The Right To Children*, and produced something noticeably more claustrophobic. Spooky, in fact, in the case of "The Devil Is In The Details", wherein a shuddering synth motif and eerie theremin-like emissions are punctuated by a hypnotist apparently addressing a crying child. Other moments such as the birdsong-speckled "The Smallest Weird Number" let more light in, but in either mood, BoC continue to produce singularly bewitching soundscapes. ***JOHNNY SHARP***

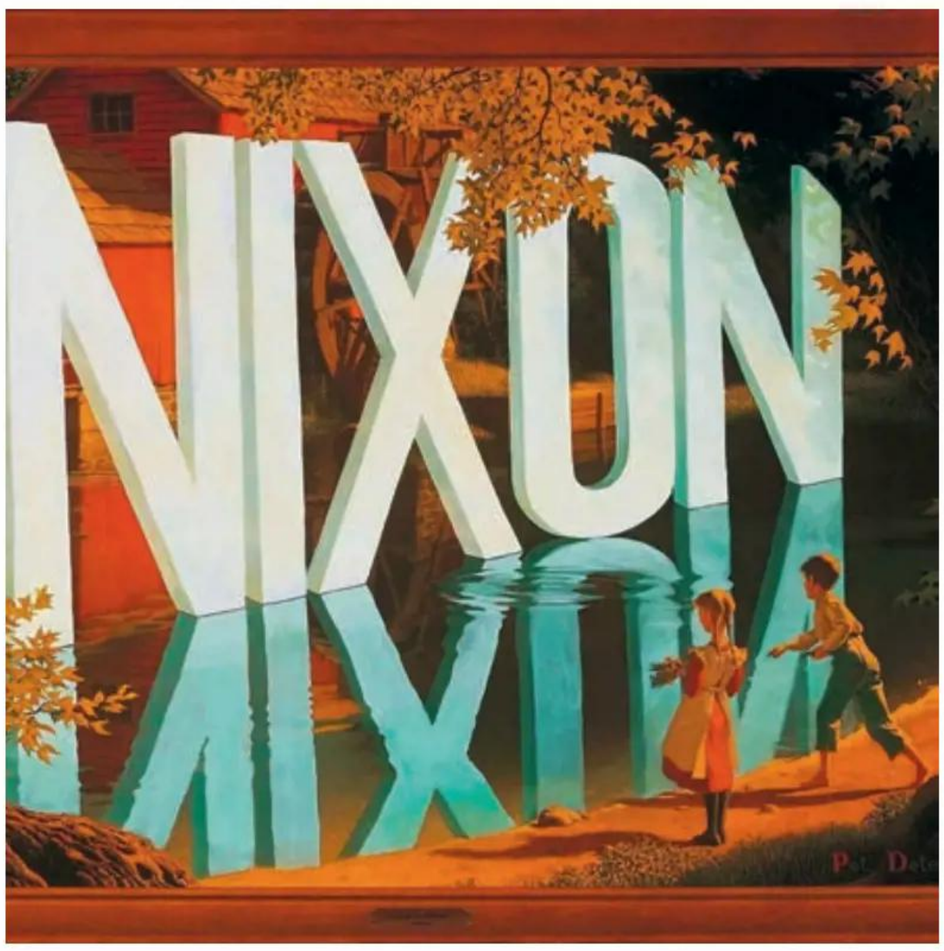
23 THE KILLERS
HOT FUSS
ISLAND, 2004

While "Mr Brightside"'s raging expression of *"jealousy, turning saints into the sea"* continues to rack up streaming figures as it resonates down the generations, that's just one example of the relentlessly ebullient appeal of this debut set from the Las Vegas quartet. From the irresistibly anthemic "Smile Like You Mean It" and "Somebody Told Me" to the deathless singalong of "All These Things That I've Done", it's a banger-filled affair of a calibre few guitar bands playing "indie rock'n'roll" (as Brandon Flowers sardonically terms it) have produced since, and chiefly responsible for their status as perennially crowd-pleasing festival headliners. ***JOHNNY SHARP***



22 GILLIAN WELCH
TIME (THE REVELATOR)
ACONY, 2001

Welch's free-spirited tour-de-force placed her love of folk, bluegrass and traditional American music into more of a rock environment, as embodied by "Elvis Presley Blues" and "I Want To Sing That Rock And Roll", two tracks that delve into the spiritual and sensual power of raw rock from a trad setting. Welch, working as ever with the great Dave Rawlings, is looser, franker and funnier than ever before on "My First Lover" and "Red Clay Halo", while the glorious, dense "April The 14th Part 1" and "Ruination Day Part 2" form a two-parter about music, the *Titanic* and Lincoln's assassination that unfold with Dylanesque misdirection. ***PETER WATTS***



21 LAMBCHOP
NIXON
MERGE/CITY SLANG, 2000

Lambchop's unique collage of chamber pop, soul and alt. country provided one of the first great records of the decade in *Nixon* – *Uncut*'s album of the year for 2000. Kurt Wagner used string and brass arrangements to temper his own fragile, broken voice, creating a powerful, vulnerable contrast on songs like "The Book I Haven't Read" and "The Old Gold Shoe". Wallow in the magnificent melancholy of "The Distance From Her To There" before revelling in "Up With People", where Wagner is joined by backing singers and horns to produce a moment of rich but always kind of grouchy jubilation. ***PETER WATTS***

REVIEWS BY STEPHEN DALTON, JOHN ROBINSON, JOHNNY SHARP, PETER WATTS

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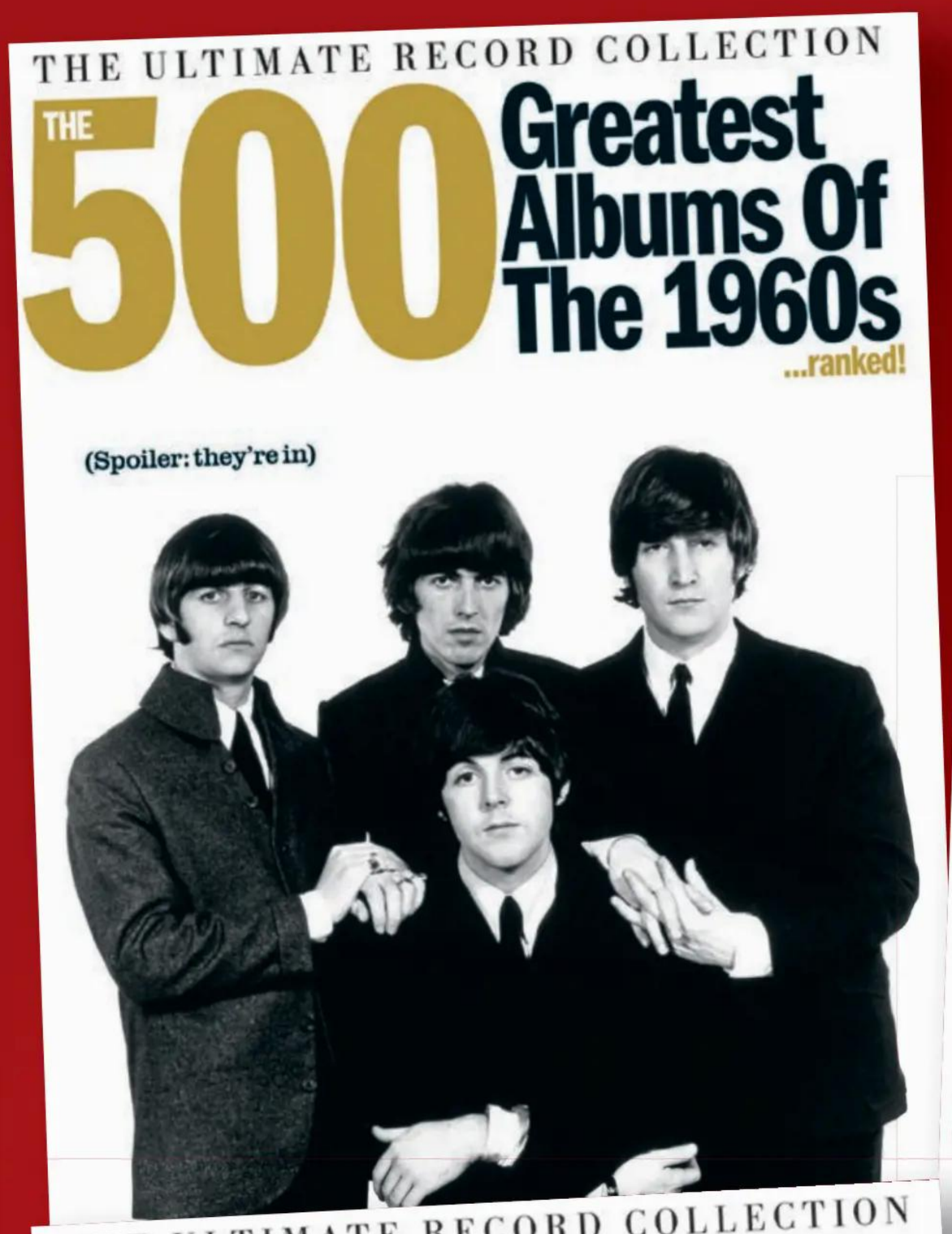

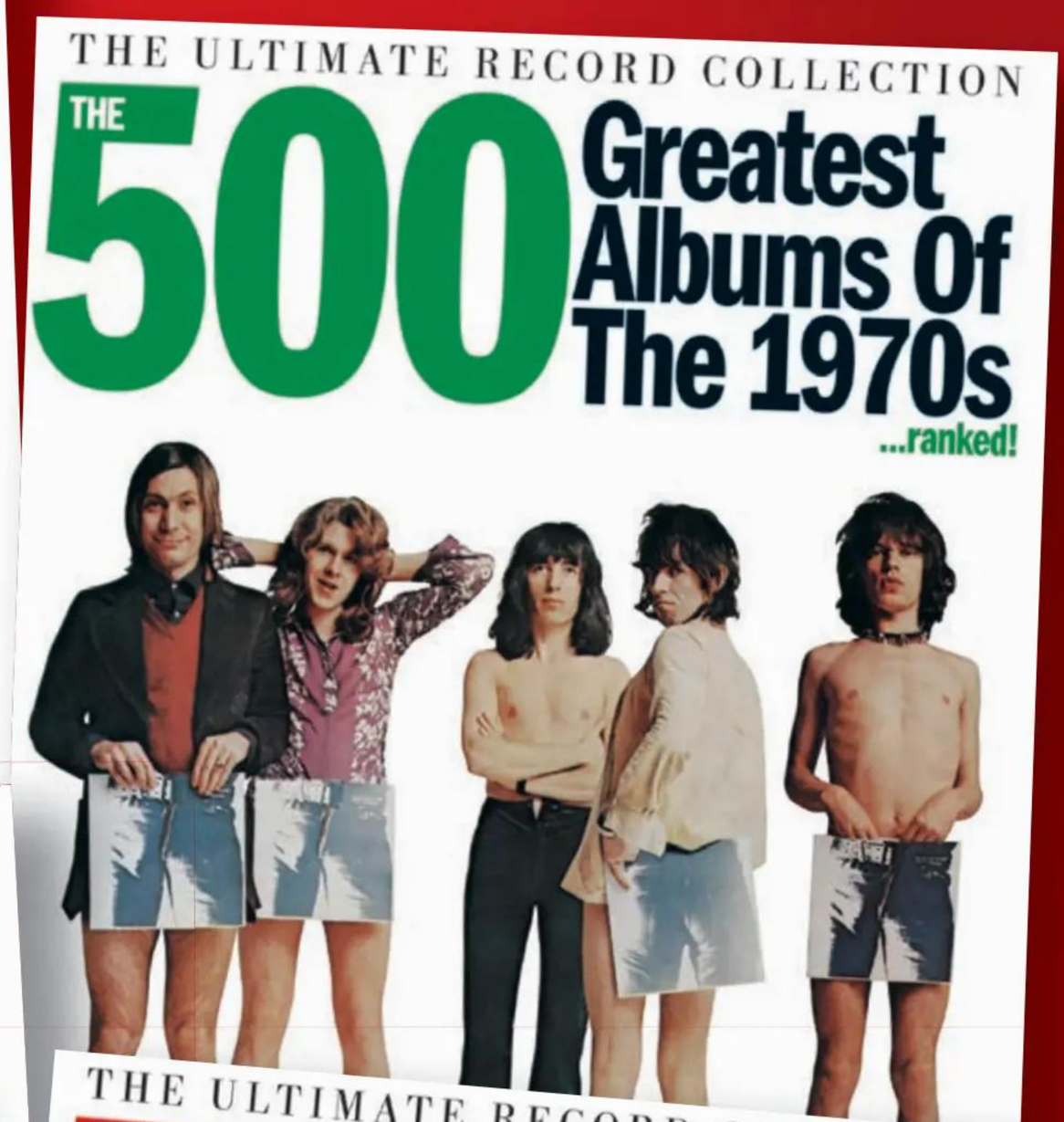

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SCAN ME

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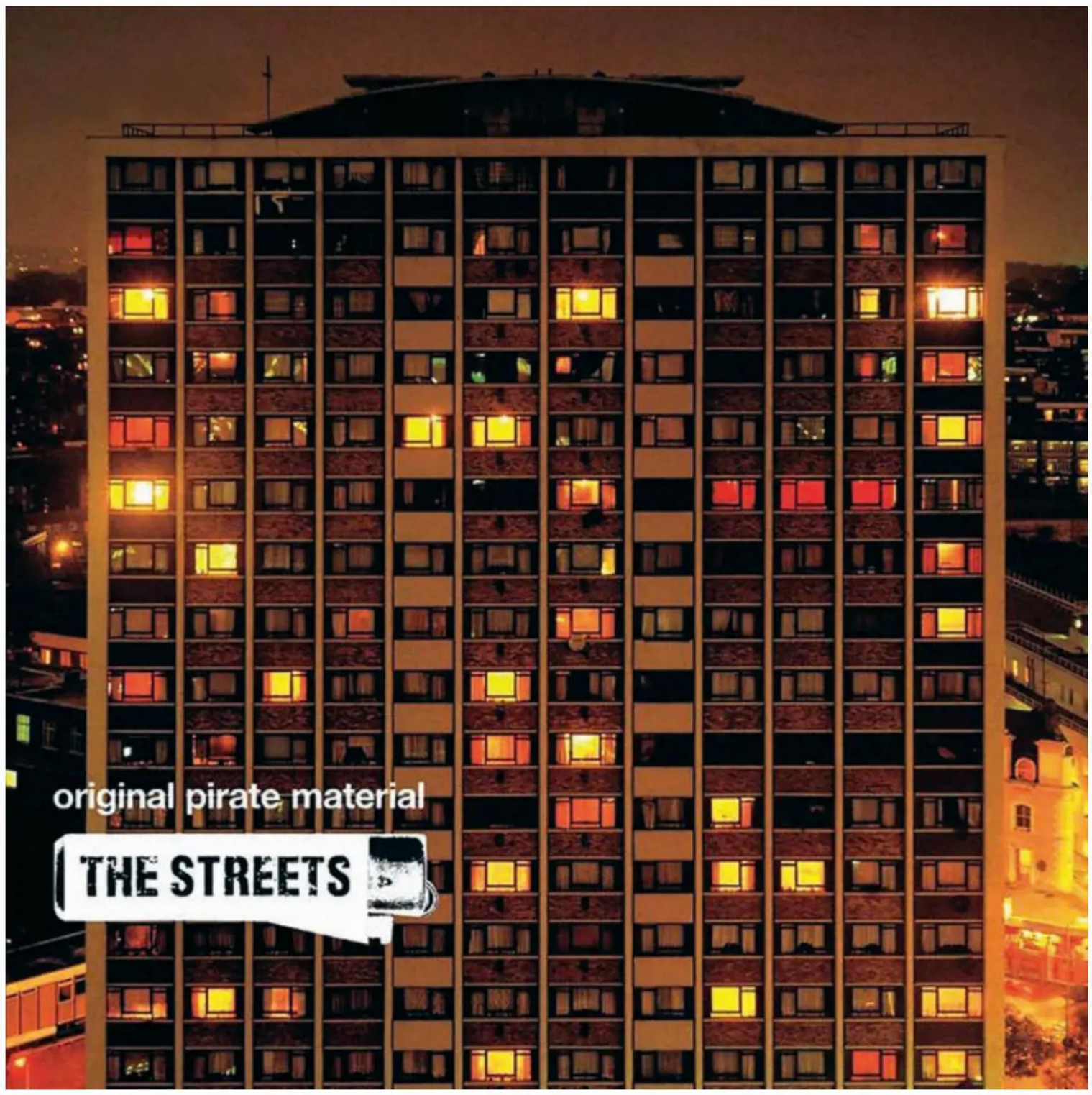
THE STREETS
ORIGINAL PIRATE MATERIAL

LOCKED ON/679, 2002

Call him Baron von Marlon! Mike Skinner's geezer triumph. *By John Robinson*

A QUALITY of a truly original voice is that you can never predict what it might say next. In the case of Mike Skinner, producer and MC of The Streets, and the dominant voice you hear on this excellent debut album, one of the things it said was: "*Lee Satchell you bastard. Stop trying to shag the birds and fight the geezers!*"

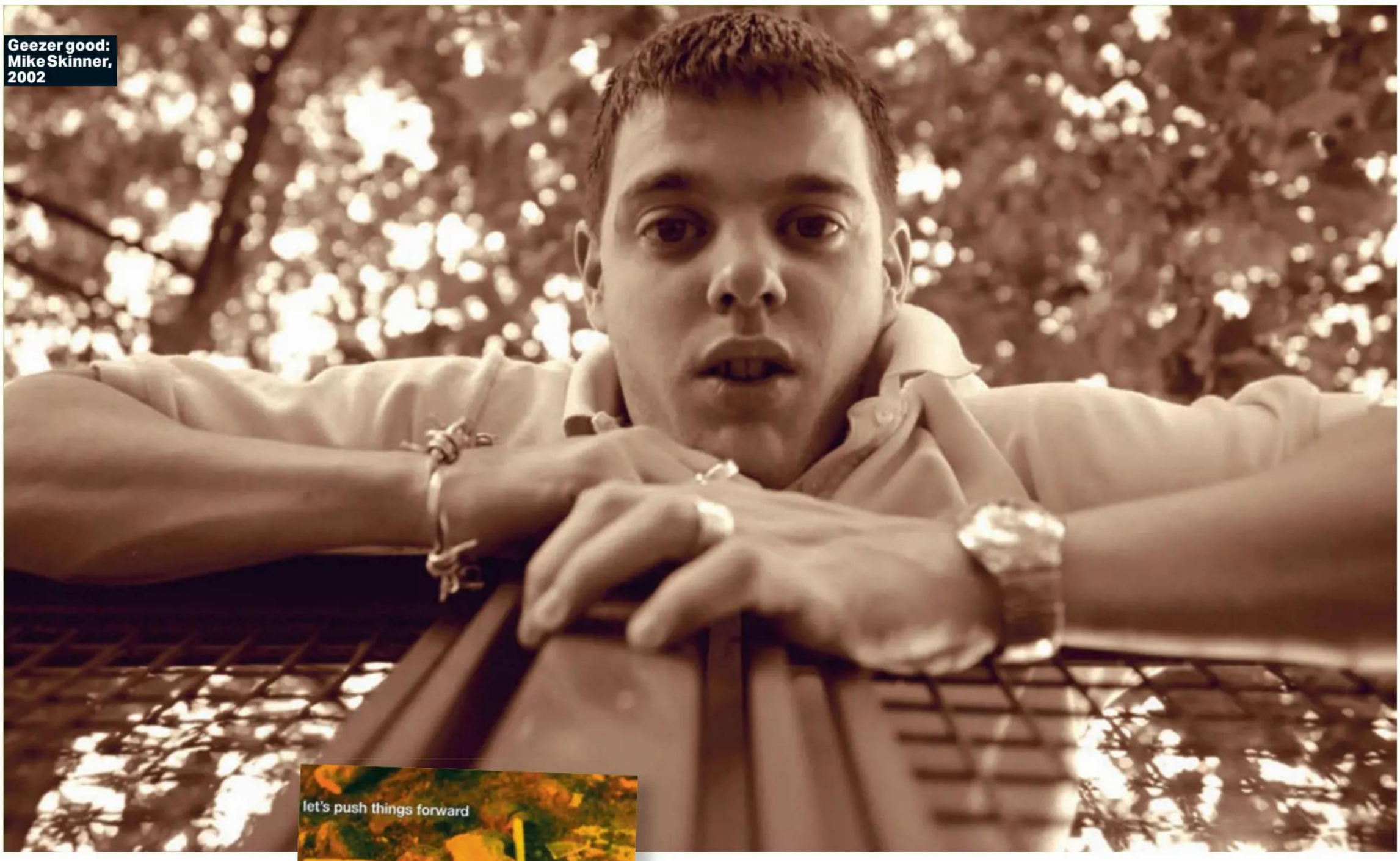
This brief and inexplicable bursting of the wall between public and private was just one of countless strokes of mad genius on *Original Pirate Material* . At a time when UK garage was perceived as a chartbound sound that accompanied the sipping of champagne in London nightclubs, The Streets offered something like a reality check. Some of the sounds were similar (these were pop songs with elegant melodies and some of the same rhythms) but in a time of aspirational clubbing, this was strictly dressed down.



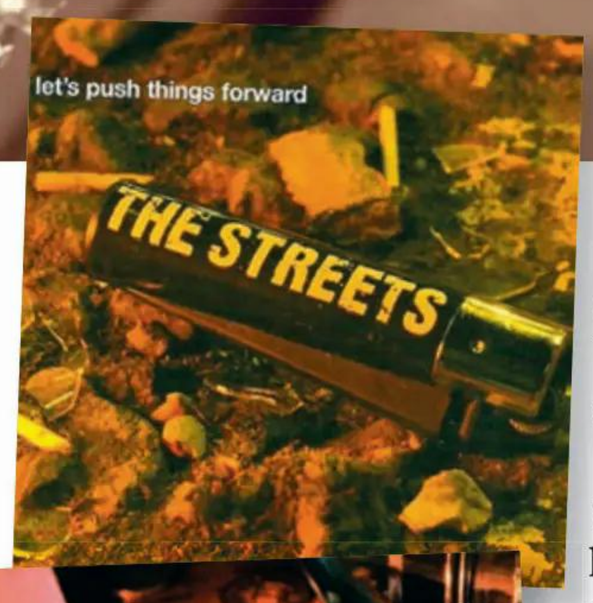
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 10; US –

PRODUCED BY: MIKE SKINNER

RECORDED AT: MIKE SKINNER'S HOUSE, BRIXTON



Geezer good: Mike Skinner, 2002



The second – and more commercially successful – Streets album, *A Grand Don't Come For Free*, was a kind of concept album, a shaggy dog story about a misplaced thousand pounds. *Original Pirate Material* was tighter, by virtue of being looser: "a day in the life of a geezer".

Not a strict 24 hours, perhaps, but a contained cycle in which all important human life was represented. Get up late, roll a spliff, contemplate the events of the night before. Arrange to meet mates, conduct low-level shady business. Entertain a relationship while continuing to have a good time. Win some, lose some. Go out and do it all over again.

The music fuelled the lifestyle and vice versa. "*This ain't your archetypal street sound*", Skinner says in "Let's Push Things Forward". "*This ain't a track it's a movement*". And *Original Pirate Material* did a magnificent job of drawing converts to its cause. Heroic string themes, stirring vocal melodies, the likes of "Same Old Thing" (subject: another midweek four-pint pub visit) might be talking about social paralysis, but it sounds completely cinematic.

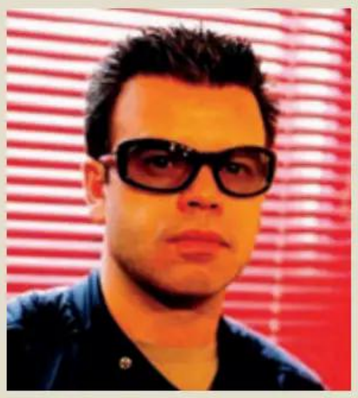
The vulnerable hero of this movie, Skinner and his persona are key to the success of the piece. A song like "Geezers Need Excitement" or "The Irony Of It All" presented the wry social reportage much remarked on at the time, but the vivid character of his central voice – ebullient wide boy with an insightful side – becomes more impressive as the album develops.

Out back in the world after the romantic disappointment of "It's Too Late", the superb "Too Much Brandy" finds Skinner and his crew out in Brixton, drunk and illuminated with great verbal brilliance: "*Call me Baron von Marlon/One has a monocle and cigar/ Dickie bow and long johns...*"

Impressively, The Streets never allow things to run away from themselves. At the end of the album "Stay Positive" is there to remind you that your investment in the good times can go right down as well as up. The genius of the *Original Pirate Material* is that you can turn the page and do it all over again. ●

THREE MUSICIANS MENTIONED IN *ORIGINAL PIRATE MATERIAL*

ARTFUL DODGER
Hitmaking garage duo Mark Hill and Pete Devereux (mentioned in "Let's Push Things Forward") were the first artists to feature the talents of Craig David. The pair no longer own the rights to their own name.



PAUL OAKENFOLD
"Oakie" is a bit of a figure of fun these days. Still, Skinner's cap is doffed to him on "Weak Become Heroes" as a godfather of British clubbing. There's an Oakie version of the track "Feat The Streets".

DANNY RAMPLING
Another Rave godfather. Skinner keen to point out that he wasn't larging in 1989, but in 1995 – he just knew who the OG DJs were, and what they did for the scene.

BENEDICT JOHNSON/REDFERNS;GETTY IMAGES

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THE WHITE STRIPES
ELEPHANT

XL, 2003

Retreating to an archaic age makes the Stripes a modern age phenomenon. *By Daniel Dylan Wray*

OVER the course of 2003, The White Stripes stampeded across pop culture. After starring together in the Oscar-winning *Cold Mountain*, Jack began dating A-list actress Renee Zellweger, turning himself into unlikely tabloid fodder. The band ended the year with a blockbuster album on their hands. Reflecting on this period in 2004, Jack said: "There's been almost no pre-warning for anything that's happened in the last 18 months."

Yet, despite *Elephant* being an album that would accompany the band into a heady world of fame and tabloid sensationalism, its genesis was rooted in simplicity. "Our idea was to strip away everything unnecessary," Jack told *The New York Times* in 2003, "to put ourselves in a box, to make rules for ourselves."

The box that Jack and Meg put themselves into was Toe Rag, a modest studio in East London run under strict antique analogue conditions by owner and producer Liam Watson. The White Stripes had always worked within their own hermetic vision of

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1 US 6
PRODUCED BY: JACK WHITE
RECORDED AT: TOE RAG STUDIOS, MAIDA VALE STUDIOS, LONDON

Respect duo: Meg and Jack White in 2003

instrumentation, production and colour schemes but, contrary to the usual course for rock bands, Jack claims *Elephant* was an exercise in reduction, not expansion.

They laid down 14 tracks in just 10 days. One could even read the recording of *Elephant* as something of a retreat from the encroaching fame: a temporary narrowing of their world before it would, ironically, expand beyond their control. As of February 2023, album opener "Seven Nation Army" had been streamed more than 1.2 billion times on Spotify alone and is one of the most immediately recognisable guitar riffs in popular music history.

The band are at their most effective when lyrically oblique, allowing their deeply expressive playing to lead. Or even when they leave the lyrics to someone else, as on the excellent Burt Bacharach cover "I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself". Punctuated with yelps and stabs of guitar, as Jack's voice shifts from quiet puppy whimper to crazed shrieks, it lifts the original's sense of aimless ennui to a full-blooded scream of frustration.

The Meg sung "Cold Cold Night" is ostensibly a tweak on Peggy Lee's "Fever" and moves along with the same creeping shuffle. The sprawling seven-minute "Ball And Biscuit" is all rootsy honky-tonk stomp littered with outrageous and audacious guitar playing that is both weighty and piercing, a total hoot. And "The Hardest Button To Button", riven with the hard-nosed bitterness of an ignored older child, is kind of a sister track to "Seven Nation Army" – all hot-headed charge and bass-heavy tone – and is as close as the band get to a three-minute pop song on the record.

Elephant stands not only as a singular record in the band's catalogue, peppered with some of their best work, but also as something of a unique relic and document of the era. A time when garage rock revivalists could be rocketed to almost pop star levels of fame. Increasingly the band's ascent, mass exposure, blockbuster physical sales and global appeal feels like the final chapter of an industry that was leaving behind a golden era and hurtling blindly into the unknown. ●

THREE OBJECTS OF INTEREST ON THE COVER

CIRCUS TRUNK
Much of the symbolism in the cover artwork relates to elephants. The creatures are often to be found in circuses, hence the circus trunk bearing a "III", Jack White's signature

WHITE RIBBONS
Elephants never forget, represented by this time-honoured form of memory-jogging

CRICKET BAT
Jack has claimed the entire image is that of an elephant, with the band as ears and the cricket bat acting as a tusk

LEX VAN ROSSEN/MAI/REDFERNS

“They wanted to try everything...”

When THE WHITE STRIPES set out to consolidate the success of *White Blood Cells*, they chose to time-warp back to the early ’60s and record in a tiny eight-track retro studio in Hackney, full of antique recording equipment and zero computers. Now LIAM WATSON’s Toe Rag Studios is an analogue legend. *Elephant*’s co-producer runs Mark Beaumont through the making of their masterpiece.

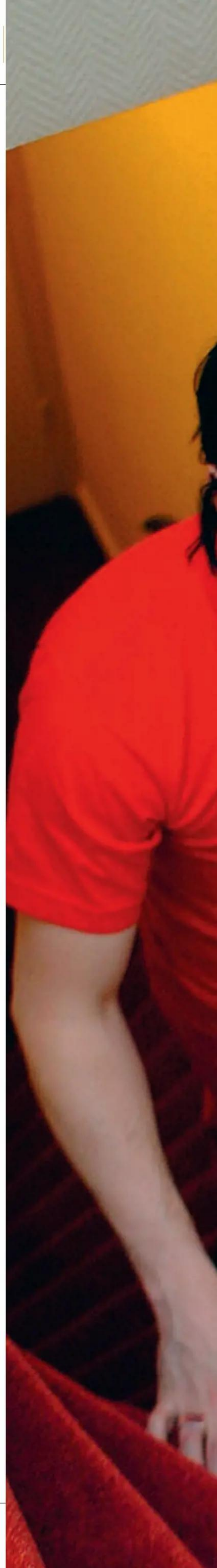
UMG THE WHITE STRIPES 04.23

HOW did you originally set up Toe Rag? “I originally set it up in about ’91 but then moved to the premises that we recorded The White Stripes in ’98. The original one was kind of similar. It was a bit smaller and it was a shared space. It wasn’t really quite as good as the studio in Hackney; it was good at the time. I shared it with other people and it was in Shoreditch before Shoreditch became what it is now. By the time we left it was a bit different, so we moved out to Hackney.”

What was the ethos? “My ethos was that I wanted to learn how to make good-quality audio without relying on contemporary technology. Which at the beginning was something I wanted to learn about. It wasn’t something that anyone was really talking about at that time when I set up and it was something that I wanted to find out. I knew a little bit about recording studios and stuff because I’d worked in record companies and things like that, and the audio I enjoy listening to was recorded a long time ago. I’m not talking about lo-fi stuff, I’m talking about everything. The quality really is good on very simple equipment. So I wanted to know why that was and I want to find out how I could do that myself.”

What was the studio like by the time the White Stripes arrived? “A studio is never completed or finished. It’s an evolving workspace. At that time it was very simple. I had an eight-track recorder. I had a mixing desk that had come from the BBC and it was a pretty simple setup really.”

The place had the feel of the early ’60s too. “Yeah, I like that style but also when you’re looking at the pictures of the classic, iconic recording studios, the way they looked was functional as well. It has to do with the acoustics. If you’re going to have acoustic treatment in a room, you’ve got choices on how you do that. The floor being a reflective surface was a choice based on acoustic treatment, and those asphalt tiles, they’re really hard to get now. When I set up that place in ’98 there was a place in Whitechapel where you could go and buy them off the shelf and they had every colour under the sun. It’s all gone now and my floor looks pretty knackered. Anyway, that was a decision – I didn’t want carpet, I didn’t want a soft, dead floor. I wanted a reflection to come off that. The thing with the perforated tile, that was an acoustic treatment that does specific things and nearly every studio had that stuff up. When I spoke to acoustic experts in the early ’90s asking them about that stuff, everyone said, ‘You don’t want them, they’re terrible.’ But I thought, ‘All the records I like were recorded ➢



DIMITRI HAKKE/REDFERNS

Crimson tide: Jack and Meg in Amsterdam, January 21, 2003

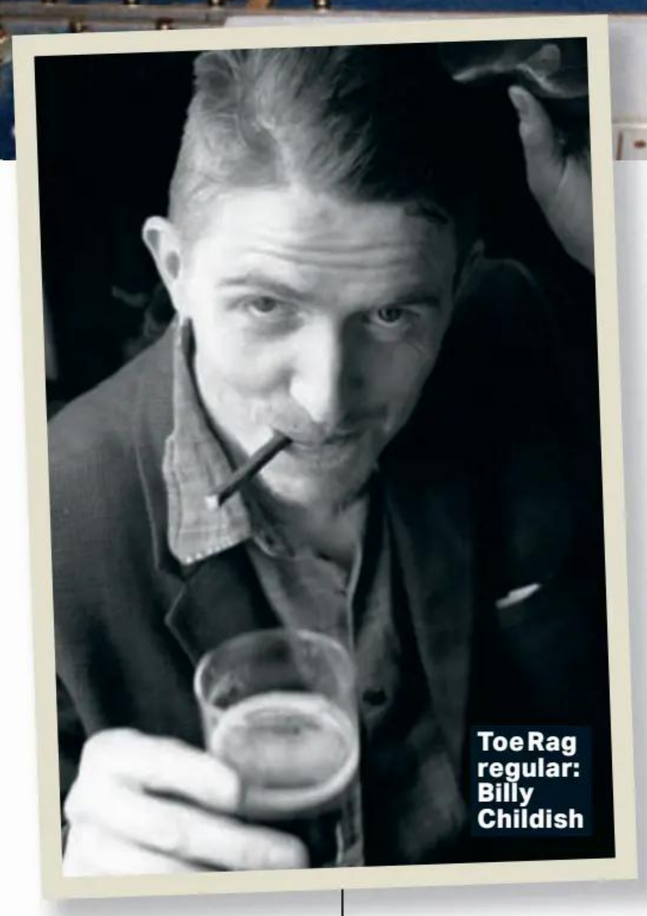
Console proprietor: Liam Watson at Toe Rag Studios in 2003

in studios covered in those things.' I realised kind of what they were saying, but your acoustic treatment isn't just one piece, it's a whole load of different things that go together. But I like that look."

What gear did you have in there? "I got a lot of stuff from the BBC in the early '90s, when they used to have their redundant store. You used to be able to go down there and buy some of the old equipment. But that's all finished. By the time I'd got to Hackney those days had long gone."

Was there anything that you specifically refused to have? "I didn't really want to work with computers and I still don't want to work with computers. I don't really like computers. It's not because I think there's anything particularly bad about the sound, people use whatever they use and you can get a good-sounding record out of anything. I just wasn't interested in it personally and I haven't changed either. I'm still not hearing any reason why I should change."

Who was using the studio? "Prior to [The White Stripes] arriving I had quite a lot of people that you've probably never heard of. There was a lot of garage bands and rock'n'roll bands and that kind of thing going around that were a lot of the time coming to me. One of the people that was using the studio a lot back in the day prior to The White Stripes was Billy Childish, who was probably the most well-known person around now, and a lot of stuff associated with him. A certain amount of people that were coming in were connected to that and back in those days in the '90s it was a little bit different in a way to how it is now. There were a lot of bands around."



Toe Rag regular: Billy Childish

What did you make of the garage sound and Billy's music? "When I was a teenager, I used to go see him in the '80s and I used to really like it. I liked all of the American '60s garage records and thought they sounded good. I don't think it was really a revival, it was something that never really went away. But I suppose it did become a little bit of a centre for that sort of thing for a while."

How did The White Stripes hear about you? "They heard about me because the records that were coming out of the studio were getting into shops all around the world. And I think specifically one of the reasons why they came to me was because friends of Jack were in London, and they did a recording at the studio, went back to Detroit and told Jack all about the studio. I think he knew about it a little bit before but he really liked it and when they came over he got in contact with me and they asked the band I was in at the time to support them on their tour. So when I met him at their first gig at the 100 Club, he immediately came up to me and said, 'I've heard about your studio.' And that was it."

What did you know about them before they arrived? "I didn't know anything about them. I'd seen an article about them in a new band page or whatever. So that's all I knew. And then I got a phone call saying, 'We're going to support this band on this tour.' I didn't really know anything about them at the time. I went to the gig at the 100 Club and I couldn't really see them because it was so crowded. I liked some of it, but I didn't really know, I wasn't too sure on the first night. Some of it I quite liked and some of it I wasn't too sure about. But I got to like them once I'd spent a bit of time with them and saw them at a few more gigs."

What was your first impression of them when they arrived at the studio? "I'd spent a week with them prior to them coming into the studio on tour, and then they came in just before they went back to the States. I think they'd had a quick look at it before and then they came in just to do something – they did that thing with Holly Golightly that actually ended up on the album. We did it that evening, so that was quite fun. Quite simple and fun. And then they set up as they did as the band. I remember recording them and struggling to make it sound good because they were just messing around really. I remember being a bit concerned, thinking. 'Jesus, I'm not sure I could get this sounding any better than those records they already did.' But then Jack came up, he could see my face, and he goes, 'Hey, don't worry, we will be rehearsed by the time we come in.' And when they did come back in they'd obviously spent time getting their act together on the new stuff, so it was all fine."

What was your role? "I was engineer, and I was co-producer with Jack, I would say."

What was the process of recording *Elephant*? "I think we initially spent about 10 days and then they came back and did a little bit more work and then there was another session with just me and Jack as well. It was, I would say, about 10 or 15 days. I know that people were thinking it was really quick but there's only two of them. We took our time, we weren't rushing anything. We had enough time.

JIM DYSON/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID TONGE/GETTY IMAGES

Taken as red: The White Stripes play Heaton Park, Manchester, May 4, 2003

"The process was they dropped all their gear off, I'd prepped the studio the day before they arrived and set it up with two amps. I made sure that the electric piano and the piano and everything was mic'd up so they could go to whatever they wanted to do. The process really was Jack playing guitar through two amps, Meg playing drums and Jack had like a guide mic that went into the headphone so that he could give cues and stuff.

"They'd work on a backing track, a rhythm track, just the two of them, rehearsing it until they got it tight. And I'd also be doing the mixing as it was going down. If I was in a studio now, any microphone that's picking up audio in the studio during recording would go to a different channel on a multitrack recorder. Then you'd mix it all afterwards. I wasn't doing it like that because I didn't have a lot of tracks. Normally if I use the eight-track and I record a drum kit, I might have four or five mics on the drum kit, they get mixed down to a single channel. So by the time it's recorded, you've got a single channel of drums even though there's been four or five mics involved in recording that drum kit. I had to get that just right, so I had to know the song because that would involve mixing. Maybe at the bridge I might have the microphone up or whatever, all the stuff you do in mixing I'd have to do as they were playing it, and the same with the guitar.

"The guitar amps, there's two of them and I used multiple mics on them but then when it came to playing the multitrack back there'd be one channel for each amplifier, even though there's multiple mics. So while they were practising, I was practising the mixing moves, and it was good because that gave me enough time to get to know the structure of the song and work out what I needed to do. And also it gave them time to get it good and tight. And also it was good because if I wasn't quite ready on a mix, they'd be totally happy just to go through the songs until I was, so it was really good. That was the process."

Did you record a song a day? "It wasn't really like that. We'd go in between [songs]. When they were doing the live backing, for instance, there would just be a guide vocal. So sometimes we might do a backing track and when we got it Jack might say, 'I think I want to do the vocal on this one now.' So then we'd do the vocal, we might overdub another guitar or we might just go from one backing track to another. It was kind of spread out, it wasn't any particular regime. It was pretty loose really."

> "[Jack] came up and said, 'I heard about your studio.' So that was it"
>
> LIAM WATSON

Were there any notable moments of magic that you remember? "It was all good fun. I remember being really happy with the way that we were working and I was really enjoying the input that I was having. I'd been working with people in the past that were quite difficult to work with in a way because I might want to try something or suggest a certain way of doing something and I'd often get shot down. But with them, they were totally cool because they just wanted to try everything. I'd say, 'Look, I got this idea we could do,' and they loved it, it worked really well."

Were there any tracks that really stood out during recording? "It's funny because I wasn't too sure about 'Seven Nation Army' when they first started playing it! When we'd finished the record and we'd mixed it I really liked it, so I was happy, but at the time you don't really know. Especially when you're just hearing something for the first time and it is just a riff – hearing the very basics before there's any vocal or any overdubs. There's not that many overdubs on it, but it's more like when you've finished it.

"I enjoyed recording some of the guitar solos, that was quite good fun. 'Black Math' was good, some of those crazy guitar solos where Jack does some crazy stuff and it'd be great up until a certain point and then we'd randomly drop in until it all sounded good. That was good fun."

Was there any music recorded that we haven't heard? "There were some tracks that didn't go on the album, but I think they were used on B-sides and things like that. I'm not really sure. I haven't really sat down and listened to the recording since it came out, I don't think. My son's quite into it now. He plays stuff on the guitar and I go, 'What's that?' He goes, 'The White Stripes.' I say, 'I don't remember that one, is that on the record I did?' 'Yeah.'"

Did making *Elephant* set you up for life? "It doesn't set me up for life because I don't get royalties from it, but I was very grateful to do it. It was 20 years ago now and I had solid, consistent work for a good 10 or 15 years after that. I'm just completely grateful about it. When they came into the studio, I wasn't in a position to start negotiating, I just needed to do it. I needed to do it with them more than they needed to do it with me."

It made the studio famous. "Exactly. I'd been making my living from doing recording studios for the best part of 10 years and it was fine. I was doing what I was doing but it wasn't as if anyone has ever heard of me beyond a certain niche scene. So it was quite exciting that suddenly people are interested in what you're doing and talking about it. I thought doing this might be a good thing to do – I wanted to do it because I liked The White Stripes but also, within the music industry anyway, people hear it. And then when it went fucking massive, it was like 'Wow!' and still people are talking about it now, which is great."

What big names did you have come down after *Elephant*? "Supergrass came in quite shortly after that and did a couple of B-sides, that was quite fun. I had calls from all sorts of people. I remember getting a call from U2 when it was at No 1. 'Hi, I'm calling up from the U2 office, can we come down and see the studio?' This guy came down and it was quite small in a horrible building in Hackney and I never heard from him again!" ●

JON SUPER/REDFERNS

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JOANNA NEWSOM
YS
DRAG CITY, 2006

A magical fable: beauty, thorns, cymbalom and all. *By Peter Watts*

THE mid-2000s ushered in a new era of unorthodox singers like Antony Hegarty and Devendra Banhart, but few were quite as unusual as Joanna Newsom, whose strangled swoops and nasal twang made no concession to the rules. But while Björk, Kate Bush and Joni Mitchell provided some comforting reference points, there was little precedent for much of what Newsom delivered on *Ys*, an album that saw her voice and harp combine on five insanely verbose and lengthy tracks, the shortest of which lasts seven minutes. This journey is long but it's spellbinding, with Newsom accompanied by a 32-piece orchestra as well as guitar, bass, mandolin, banjo, accordion, marimba and cymbalom (an instrument that looks like a table football table only with metal strings that are hit by two sticks).

Newsom was able to corral these diverse elements into a singular work of music that unfolds like an extended medieval ballad, with lyrics that dash and dart between curlicued images while the orchestra provides a gentle backing to underline rather than

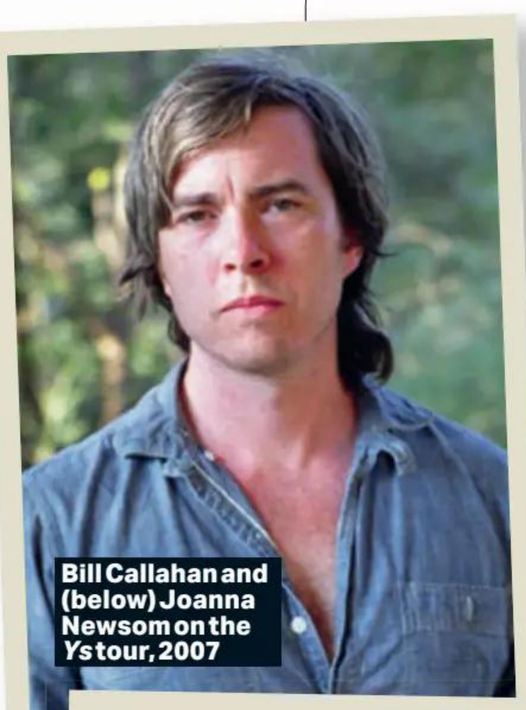
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 41; US 134
PRODUCED BY: JOANNA NEWSOM, VAN DYKE PARKS
RECORDED AT: THE VILLAGE AND ENTOURAGE, BOTH LOS ANGLES

Light entertainer: Joanna Newsom, 2006

overwhelm the central vocal. Newsom recorded her voice and harp with Steve Albini, the governor when it came to capturing the purest and most sincere sound of an instrument and singer in a room. Next, she turned to Van Dyke Parks for the string arrangements, having discovered his work on 1967's *Song Cycle*. Finally, she invited another original, Jim O'Rourke, to do the mixing.

That's quite a team, and all three of them work entirely in service to the sound of Newsom's harp, but even more so her voice. Instrumentally, there's a lot going on, almost all the time, but none of it feels superfluous and throughout it all the focus on Newsom is unrelenting. And it needs to be, because Newsom barely takes a pause as she tells these strange and unsettling stories without breaks, choruses or refrains. The arrangements force the listener to zero in on extended but ultimately rewarding narratives like the quicksilver "Monkey & Bear", which is a meticulous account of manipulation and control disguised as a fable.

Occasionally the singer has some help in navigating these epic songs with their byzantine lyrical detours. Her sister Emily, an astrophysicist, contributes backing vocals to opener "Emily", a song about sisters that includes imagery of meteors and stars. On the longest song, the 17-minute "Only Skin", Bill Callahan provides backing vocals, but the most powerful moment comes when Newsom double-tracks her own lead, bringing a sudden spitting fury to the song. That anger, or passion, is there on the glorious "Stardust And Diamonds" – with an impeccable vocal performance that acts as a single-minded riposte to critics – and it's there again on closing number "Cosmia". It seems to speak to the emotion at the heart of the record: have the bravery, faith and stubbornness to do your own thing, whether that's in art, life, love, death or music. Be a bear, not the monkey. ●



Bill Callahan and (below) Joanna Newsom on the *Ys* tour, 2007

THREE KEY *YS* COLLABORATORS

STEVE ALBINI
The late engineer was king of audio quality. "I did the easy part," he told *Uncut*. "I pressed Record, she played her ass off, and sang like an angel."

VAN DYKE PARKS
Newsom's feeling for classic and modern was exemplified in arranger Parks. In his own career he made the baroque pop classic *Song Cycle* – swooning loveliness was his hometown.

JIM O'ROURKE
Post *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* visionary improviser/collaborator O'Rourke was enjoying a moment. If anyone could fuse the strings/Newsom elements in the mix, it was him.

GETTY IMAGES

17

BOB DYLAN
MODERN TIMES

COLUMBIA, 2006

The magician opened up his bag of tricks. The musical arm of Bob Dylan's "big reveal".
By Bud Scoppa

MODERN Times is viewed by many Dylanophiles as the final volume of a multi-levelled trilogy pondering the final quarter of life – although he was far from finished with the subject. During the five years between the release of *Love And Theft* and the August 2006 arrival of *Modern Times* came Martin Scorsese's 2004 documentary *No Direction Home*, for which Dylan was a willing participant (surprisingly so at the time); Volume One of his *Chronicles*, published in 2005; and the May 2006 premiere of Bob Dylan's *Theme Time Radio Hour.*

Modern Times overwhelms with its scale and the sheer density of its allusions, quotations, reflections, refractions and grandstand plays. But an awareness of the numerous scholarly references from Ovid to Henry Timrod is hardly a prerequisite for being captivated by the album. *Modern Times* is so damn welcoming in its humanity, its

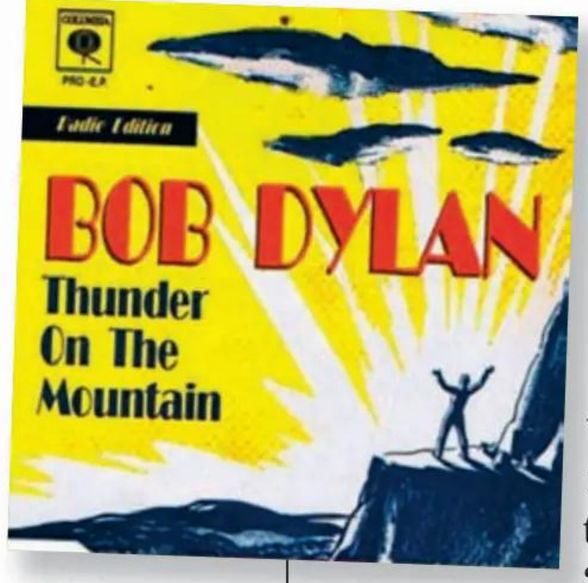
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 3 US 1
PRODUCED BY: JACK FROST (AKA BOB DYLAN)
RECORDED AT: CLINTON RECORDING, NYC

Adapting with the *Times*: in New Orleans, 2006

musical friskiness and the relentless forward movement of its verbiage that the listener can forego another game of Spot The Reference and choose instead to just roll with it, casually taking in the unfolding tableaux as a series of fast and slow dances, and let the mystery do its magic subliminally.

Dylan's savvy players channel the Stones of 1964 cranking out Chuck Berry riffs on opener "Thunder On The Mountain", mirror his own *Highway 61 Revisited* crew on "Rollin' And Tumblin'", "Someday Baby" and "The Levee's Gonna Break", and are perfectly comfortable impersonating a workaday wedding band on "Beyond The Horizon". Through it all, Dylan the frontman doles out sentiment and irony in equal measure, unconcerned about the contradictory nature of these impulses.

At times, it seems like Dylan – or his meta-persona – is having a three-quarter-life crisis, lusting after far younger women – Alicia Keys pops up unexpectedly near the start of opening cut "Thunder On The Mountain", while two songs later, on "Rollin' And Tumblin'", he confesses that "*Some young lazy slut has charmed away my brains*". But between manifestations



of a recharged libido lies the gentle, seemingly contented "Spirit On The Water", which ambles along like a couple strolling hand and hand through meadows of wildflowers until the final verse, which stops the lovers in their tracks. "I wanna be with you in paradise", the song's ardent narrator sings, "*and it seems so unfair/I can't go back to paradise no more/I killed a man back there*".

Elsewhere he keeps the hearth fire crackling in life-embracing fashion through the elegiac sequence of "Beyond The Horizon", "Workingman's Blues #2" and "Nettie Moore" before the sky turns ominous. If "*Love and Theft*"'s "High Water (For Charlie Patton)" had been eerily prophetic, "The Levee's Gonna Break" comes across like a firsthand report of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Things get darker still on the concluding "Ain't Talkin'", a biblical, apocalyptic, hallucinatory epic.

The first album to appear during Dylan's ongoing Big Reveal, *Modern Times* lays out his sources more overtly than on any previous album; belatedly but determinedly, this magician was opening up his bag of tricks. ●

THREE BOB DYLAN ADVERTS

2007 IPOD

The logical end point of Steve Jobs being a Dylan fan: a succinct studio performance clip advising you to listen to the new Bob Dylan album on your iPod

2007 CADILLAC ESCALADE

Just Bob, driving through the desert, listening to "Held" by Smog, like you sort of hope he does occasionally anyway

2009 PEPSI SUPERBOWL AD

Vintage Dylan footage cut to images showing the differences but also the continuity between the generations

DAVID GAHR

16

ARCTIC MONKEYS
WHATEVER PEOPLE SAY I AM THAT'S WHAT I'M NOT

DOMINO, 2006

Taxi for the big time! A hypeless, timeless debut album. *By John Robinson*

IN the video for the first Arctic Monkeys single, Alex Turner announces the name of the band, and gives an instruction: "Don't believe the hype."

Turner was already his generation's finest wordsmith, but hype (*n*: "extravagant publicity or promotion") wasn't quite the word for it. In the three years between their first gig and their debut album the band had put in serious work: recorded demos of nearly 20 very good songs, burned them on to CDs and given them away at gigs, in so doing building a fanatical local following. In the classic indie tradition, they self-funded and released 1,000 copies of a debut single. This musical good news was then shared for free online. If anything received extravagant promotion from the enterprise it was the internet: while the music press correctly raved about the message, the tabloids, hot for something like another White Stripes story, wrote extensively about the medium.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
UK 1; US 24

PRODUCED BY:
JIM ABBISS

RECORDED AT:
THE CHAPEL, SOUTH THORESBY; 2 FLY, SHEFFIELD

Arctic Monkeys in 2006: (-r) Jamie Cook, Andy Nicholson, Alex Turner, Matt Helders

Nearly 20 years on, MySpace probably isn't something you need to think about very often, but *Whatever You Say I Am, That's What I'm Not* (a line spoken by Albert Finney's Arthur Seaton in kitchen-sink drama *Saturday Night And Sunday Morning*) owns its place in the collective consciousness as a classic debut album.

You join us in a city nightclub. Nearly all the songs (an exception being the lovely "Mardy Bum", about a relationship argument) take place here, as Alex Turner takes a position as the Samuel Pepys of the south Yorkshire rock scene, chronicling the night within the night, circa 2004. The music gives wiry indie rock, but on closer examination reveals clever jazzy chording, Western themes, funky breakdowns and multiple hooklines. On the ground, the devil is also in the detail: the alcopops, the brogues and trilbies, "the bit where you pay", cash machine visits, great ideas which vanish in the morning, and pre-smartphones filling with drunken ramblings.

Male inarticulacy and the incoherence of the courtship ritual are Turner's big themes here as we follow him – generally at high speed – through his domain. No one wants to say "concept" about a record as joyful and brimming with energy as this but we're certainly on a tight itinerary as we are led in a series of impressionistic scenes through a big night to the following morning, taking in a vaguely comic run-in with the law and a taxi ride which serves to review events for latecomers. It's a night where men drink enough to be able to speak, or dance, and where (in the stone classic "Fake Tales Of San Francisco"), a line is drawn in the sand between the poseurs and the people who are really committing to something, and not as he says later "*Thinking about things but not actually doing... the things*".

It's a key moment. The explosive character of the record could have given the impression of a kind of flukey beginners' luck, a kid striking it lucky transcribing his night out. Clues were bring dropped, though with those references to Shakespeare and "*writers' block*". Even with a drink in its hand, this was a work of art by someone meticulously building a story and a style – who knew exactly what he was doing. ●

THREE PRE-ALBUM RECORDINGS/RELEASES

BENEATH THE BOARDWALK (2004)
The collection of 18 demos which the band would burn onto CD and hand out at gigs, sparking the first internet music-sharing spree

FIVE MINUTES WITH ARCTIC MONKEYS (2005)
A two-tracker featuring early versions of "Fake Tales Of San Francisco" and "From The Ritz To The Rubble", released on the band's own Bang Bang Records label, which was created solely to host the 3,000-copy release. Actually, 6'11

BIGGER BOYS AND STOLEN SWEETHEARTS (2005)
Promo single of a song which would eventually land on the B-side of "I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor"

ANDY WILLSHER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

THE INNER SLEEVE ...INSIDE THE ALBUM

"Not bad for a first job"

The debut album by ARCTIC MONKEYS has turned heads, broken sales records and made them a national talking point. *Uncut* meets the band, and gets the view from inside their inner circle – and beyond it. Are they the new Beatles or have they just sold as many records as James Blunt? "It's the passage of time which decides these things," ALEX TURNER tells Paul Moody. "The next big thing is always around the corner..."

UNCUT 12.06

ALEX TURNER is looking to the future. He's wondering whether his band, the Arctic Monkeys, will still be playing live in 40 years' time, cranking out tracks from their debut long-player, *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not*. This, by some distance, has been the most successful album of 2006.

"If you're gonna get out, you've got to get out early," he says. "Like The Jam. Weller always said they were about youth. But then you get tempted into carrying on, or doing a comeback because you're skint."

"Look at The Beatles' career," adds guitarist Jamie Cook. "It was only eight years in total, wasn't it? You couldn't do it like that now. No-one would allow you to make that many albums in that short a time."

The Monkeys meet *Uncut* in the Citrus Rooms, once the student union of Barnsley College. It's an indication of how far – and how fast – they've come that tonight they're playing a sell-out gig here. Three years ago, three-quarters of the band – Turner, drummer Matt Helders and new bassist Nick O'Malley – idled away lunch hours in this very building. "The first gig we ever went to together was The Vines," says Turner. "In this building, when it were the old student union. It was brilliant. Tonight is like we've come full circle."

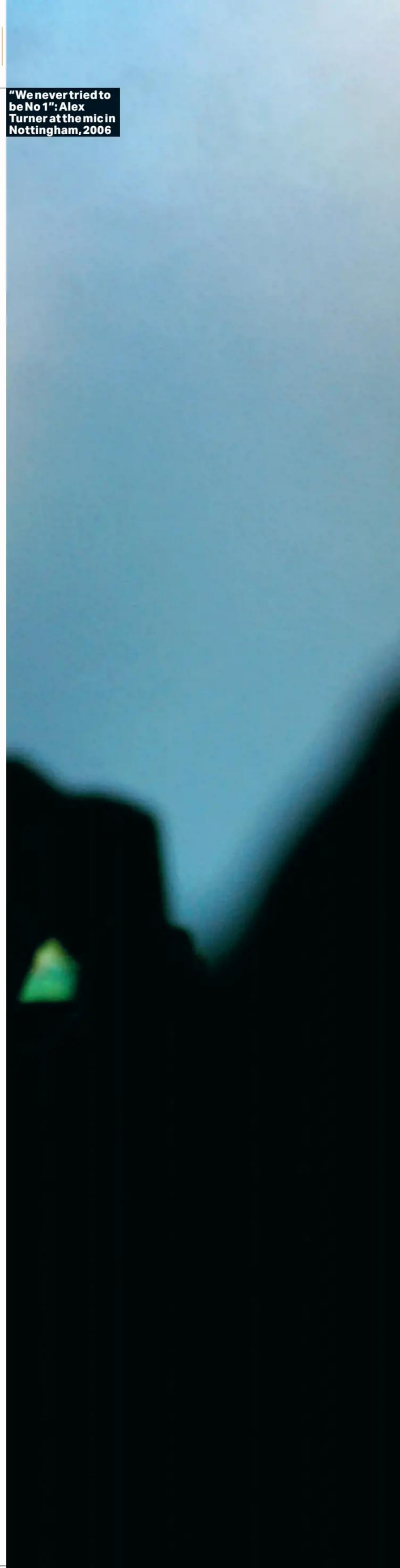
Possessed of Paul Weller's intensity, the laconic delivery of Jarvis Cocker and the coiffeured 'do of peak-period Rod Stewart, 20-year-old Turner appears to have beamed down from rock's central casting. Is he aware of the devotion his band incite?

"Of course. But I think if bands try to change things or become spokesmen for a generation it puts at least as many people off as it excites," he says. "When we were starting out we never took notice of no-one, you just have to do what you're doing. It's the passage of time which decides these things; who's important. And who isn't. Besides, the next big thing is always around the corner."

So, just how big are the Arctic Monkeys? Look around. Having released the fastest-selling debut album of all time in January (a reported 363,735 sales in the first week; current sales 1.1m), and scooped the Mercury Prize in September, the Monkeys are indisputably theband of 2006.

"It was a surprise, all this," says Turner. "When we went to No 1... I mean Top 20 would've been great. We never did any TV and we never tried to be No 1. And you know what? The minute you do start to try, it almost ruins it, doesn't it?"

Already their influence has extended beyond the narrow parameters of pop. In June, the tabloids treated the departure of bassist Andy Nicholson with a relish only reserved for those exiting rock's highest table, while in August Gordon Brown told *New Woman* in a toe-curling interview that the Monkeys "really wake you up in the morning". For most commentators, they're already firmly established as part of rock's regal bloodline.



"We never tried to be No 1": Alex Turner at the mic in Nottingham, 2006

ANDY WILLSHER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

THE INNER SLEEVE ...INSIDE THE ALBUM

Cue hysteria: the original lineup of (l–r) Alex Turner, Jamie Cook, Matt Helders and Andy Nicholson

"It was clear from the start they were the apex of what had been building with The Strokes and The Libertines," explains *NME* deputy editor Alex Needham. "Our sales went up 10,000 the first time we put them on the cover. There's a slight regret that they haven't gone all the way this year. It's within their power to finally kill off Britpop and establish the noughties with its own identity."

No pressure, then. Under such scrutiny, it's little wonder the Monkeys have retreated into a shell. Having released the non-chart-eligible EP "Who The Fuck Are Arctic Monkeys?" (home to the bullish lyric: "*Bring on the backlash!*"), and the terse "Leave Before The Lights Come On", there's a sense the band's truculence is harming their career – a charge fiercely denied by PR Anton Brookes.

"This idea that the band are 'difficult' amazes me," he says. "What people don't appreciate is that they've got their own ideas. Formatting, ringtones, TV advertising – they're not interested. They don't want to sell their soul like some bands. Plus, they're just normal young lads, up for a laugh."

Easily distracted the Monkeys may be, but they're also light years from the spoilt brats of media imagination. Voluble on subjects that interest them – the minutiae of rock history; Sheffield Wednesday FC – their outlook inevitably comes via the prism of life on the road.

"We still live at home, though," says Turner. "People say, 'Oh, you're mad – move out', but we've been away for three months, living in hotels." So they watched England's exit from the World Cup backstage at a festival in Belgium (Cook: "It all kicked off; they asked us to leave!"); were unaware of Keith Richards' fall from the coconut tree (Turner: "Should he have been up there? If he was our age!") and dismiss the demise of *TOTP* as an irrelevance ("It wasn't really for our generation, was it?" muses Cook). If their alcohol consumption is up – Helders cheerily admits to "drinking all the time now" – life before the band is slowly slipping into the distance.

What were their highlights of the year?

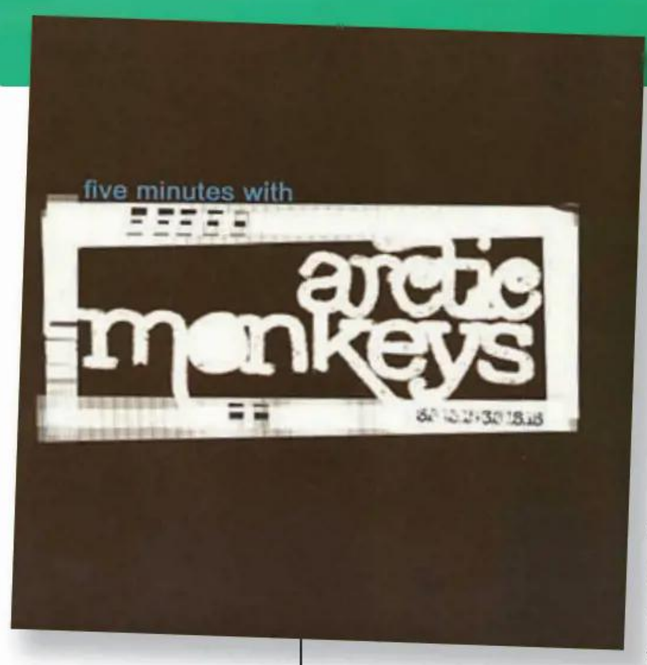
"The band has been the highlight of the year," asserts Turner pointedly. "All of it. The best gig was Berlin. It was a Saturday night and Germany had just played their last game in the World Cup. The atmosphere was incredible, all these different nationalities totally up for it.

"And we met Jack White, Noel and Liam. And Drew Barrymore – she were right sound!"

This year also saw the Monkeys make their third trip to Japan, where the album has sold over 150,000 copies. "It's a mad place, isn't it?" laughs Turner. "Fans just wait at the hotel for you all day. One of them picked me up once!"

"The proper hardcore ones are still there when you get back at two," adds Cook. "And then when you go down to breakfast, they're still there!"

"We were due to leave at six in the morning," continues Turner. "And one of them said to me: 'I might not be able to be here in the morning.' I was like: 'Er, don't worry about it. It's OK!'"



"We met Jack White and Drew Barrymore – she were right sound!"

ALEX TURNER

The lowlight, though, was the departure of bassist Andy Nicholson. His replacement was an old friend from Barnsley College, Nick O'Malley, who exudes the level-headedness you'd expect from someone who had been planning a career in criminology before stardom came calling.

"It wasn't like, 'Shit, let's get a session player in,'" says Cook. "But if Nick hadn't done it, I don't know what we'd have done."

"We're just the same as we were," adds Turner. "Having Nick in the band has given us a kick up the arse, both in the playing and the hanging about. There's no drama..."

Alex was always the quiet one," says Joe Carnell, singer with fellow Sheffield band Milburn and a schoolfriend from Stocksbridge High secondary school. "Even when we were 15 and hanging out, Alex would always stay in the background. Then, when we both formed bands, we would sit down and play songs to each other. It was then I started to realise how good he was. We've been on tour with them in Europe and to see thousands of people singing along at first hand has been incredible."

Carnell has seen up close the Monkeys' extraordinary ascent, and Turner's own development as a songwriter. He recalls, just a few years ago, when Turner worked behind the bar at local Sheffield venue the Boardwalk, switched on by The Fall and John Cooper Clarke, The Strokes and The Libertines.

"I remember the first time I saw the Monkeys play at the Boardwalk in 2003," Carnell

ANDY WILLSHER/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Monkeys Mk II: (c/wise from top left): Turner, newcomer Nick O'Malley, Cook and Helders

remembers. "Alex was wearing a tunic – he was really into Pete Doherty. He even introduced the band with the words, 'Hello, we're The Libertines'."

After meeting manager Geoff Barradale at Sheffield club The Fez and – infamously – causing power-surges nationwide as fans scrambled to download demos of "Fake Tales Of San Francisco", "A Certain Romance" and "From The Ritz To The Rubble", the band signed to Domino Records in June 2005.

"A lot of labels were already interested by the time I saw them," explains Laurence Bell, label boss at Domino, whose roster also includes Franz Ferdinand. "I went to a gig in Stockton-On-Tees. There were 250 people there and half of them knew all the words. You didn't have to be a genius to realise that this was one of those special moments where the music and the times were in perfect harmony."

"The Monkeys were shrewd in signing to Domino," says Martin Talbot, editor of trade magazine *Music Week*. "Otherwise they could have had credibility problems like the Manic Street Preachers did at the start. Nonetheless, it's disingenuous to suggest they're torch-holders of the indie flame. The fact is they're signed to the same management company as Craig David and the biggest music publishers in the world. There's a lot of corporate muscle there. I'm not comparing them musically, but at the same stage last year James Blunt had sold a similar amount of records. By the end of the year he'd doubled it. The question is, can Arctic Monkeys do the same?"

Turner is clearly keen to start recording the Monkeys' next album. Which leads you to wonder where his inspiration will come from now fame has removed him from a world of niggly girlfriends, narky bouncers and taxi-drivers taking him the long way home.

"I can't stop writing songs," he says. "I don't know what else I'm going to do. I like chucking them out there. People come up to me and go: 'I like that B-side – why didn't you use this as an A-side?' And I'm like, 'Well, you've got it, haven't you? What's the problem?'

"At the moment, I've written quite a few slower ones – but that's purely because I've been writing on my own. There's 13 or 14 songs, maybe a few more, in different states. It might be something I've done which someone played acoustic on, and some of them we all know already. There's one called 'Brian Storm' I'm pretty pleased with."

According to Laurence Bell, there are some surprises in store: "The new songs I've heard sound quite heavy, but still with a massive groove built in. 'Brian Storm' is out there – it's very bright and metallic. It'll shock a few people. They're in an adventurous mood. There's a creativity and energy in the Monkeys that most bands just can't access."

Are they worried about the pressure? Does the burden of expectation hang heavily on Turner's shoulders?

He shakes his head. "I'm not a fan of doing things because someone else did it. All the things in history happened, people did what they did without thinking about it. Things have to progress naturally, otherwise you end up as The Darkness."

He smiles broadly. "It's the best year of our lives, isn't it? Not bad for a first job, is it?

"We're in a great position at the moment. Let's not ruin it." ●

MONKEYS' BUSINESS

The Arctic Monkeys' year at a glance...

January 23: Release debut album *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not*, which becomes the fastest-selling debut in UK chart history, shifting 363,735 copies in the first week

January 24: Co-headline *NME* Awards tour with Maxïmo Park and We Are Scientists

February 15: Win Best British Breakthrough Act at the Brits

February 23: Become the first band to win Best New Band and Best British Band in the same year at the *NME* Awards; also at the Awards, the Sugababes perform their version of "I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor"

March 11: Kick off sell-out US tour playing *Saturday Night Live*: only their fourth ever TV performance

April 10: *Scummy Man* DVD released, directed by Shane Meadows collaborator Paul Frazer

April 13: Begin two-week, 12-date UK tour, culminating at Brixton Academy

April 24: Five-track EP, "Who The Fuck Are Arctic Monkeys?", is ineligible for chart inclusion

May 2: European tour opens in Paris

May 25: Nick O'Malley is drafted in as a temp replacement for "fatigued" bassist Andy Nicholson

June 19: Band's website officially announces Nicholson's departure

July 28: Monkeys start first Australasian tour in Auckland, New Zealand

August 12/13: Play festivals in Tokyo and Osaka

August 14: "Leave Before The Lights Come On" reaches No 4; the video features *Dead Man's Shoes*' Paddy Considine

August 20: The Rolling Stones kick off UK leg of the Bigger Bang tour at Twickenham. The gig was originally scheduled to take place at the new Wembley Stadium, whose construction has been delayed. Mick Jagger notes from the stage: "I think they'll have Wembley ready for the farewell tour of the Arctic Monkeys"

August 27: Carling Weekend festival gig marks the end of the band's 2006 touring commitments; reunited backstage with Nicholson

September 8: The band win the Mercury Prize

September 25: Gordon Brown claims he's "more interested in the future of the Arctic circle than the future of the Arctic Monkeys" in a speech at the Labour Party Conference

TABATHAFIREMAN/REDFERNS

Accepting the Mercury Prize at London's Grosvenor House Hotel, September 2006

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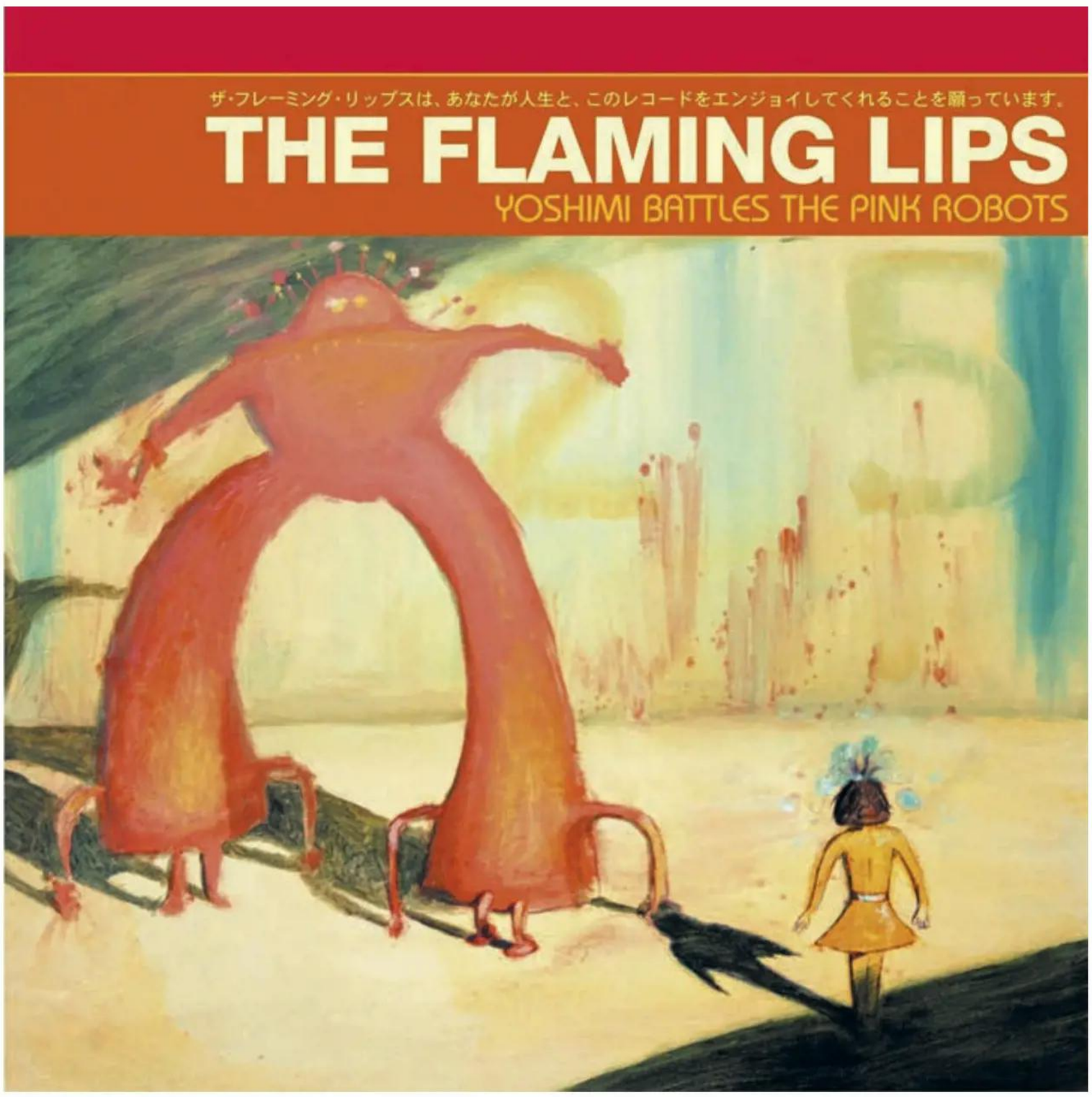
THE FLAMING LIPS
YOSHIMI BATTLES THE PINK ROBOTS
WARNER BROTHERS, 2002

Breakthrough achieved, the Lips take a "cartoonish" left turn – and scale greater heights. *By Paul Moody*

HAVING waited 15 years to gain the attention of the mainstream – finally achieved with 1999's *The Soft Bulletin* – Oklahoma's psych-pop titans could have been forgiven for repeating the formula on the follow-up. But instead of resting on their laurels they delivered something very different – and even more powerful. "After ...*Bulletin*, we could have gone in and made every record sound like that," recalled Wayne Coyne of the band's thought process at the time. "...*Bulletin* was us finding what we're good at; but we decided that we can't make it over and over. We decided to do something more cartoon-like."

On the surface of it, a manga-esque concept album about good and evil involving robots and karate, *Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots* found the Lips operating in an

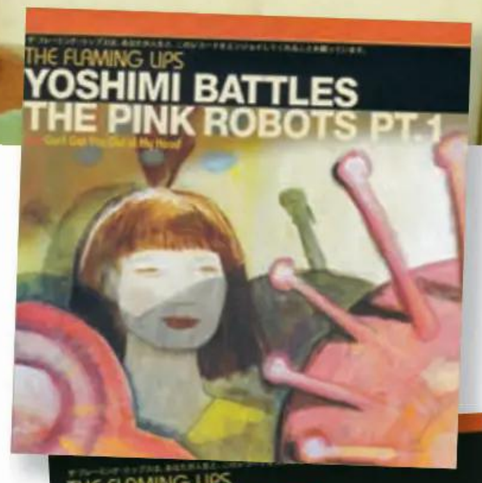


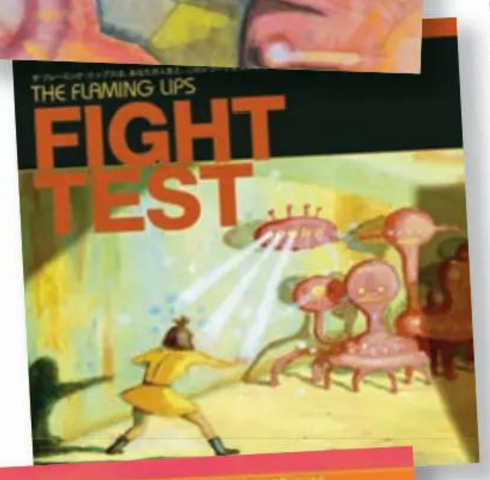
HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 13; US 50

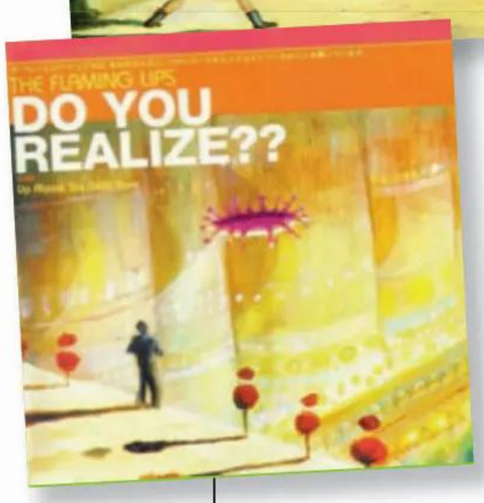
PRODUCED BY: THE FLAMING LIPS, DAVE FRIDMANN, SCOTT BOOKER

RECORDED AT: TARBOX ROAD STUDIOS, CASSADAGA, NEW YORK

Big questions, out-there sounds: (l–r) Flaming Lips' Steven Drozd, Wayne Coyne and Michael Ivins







(almost) entirely new sonic landscape, Coyne's whimsical meditations on life, the universe and everything set against a futuristic backdrop of synthetic strings, programmed beats and squelching synths, all methodically pieced together by regular producer Dave Fridmann at his studio in Cassadaga, upstate New York.

These showy aural pyrotechnics disguised the album's true nature, however. Named for Boredoms drummer Yoshimi P-We, a close friend of the band (and album contributor) whose abstract singing style was observed in the studio to be suggestive of battling monsters, it came steeped in melancholy, the fragility of life reflected in every unsettling tape-speed fluctuation and unexpected blast of glitchy electronica. Lyrically, it found Coyne digging deeper than ever, wrestling with the big themes – mortality, the nature of existence – as if we're eavesdropping on an ongoing internal dialogue, the singer's sense of unease heightened by both the death of his father and band member Steven Drozd's continuing battle with heroin addiction.

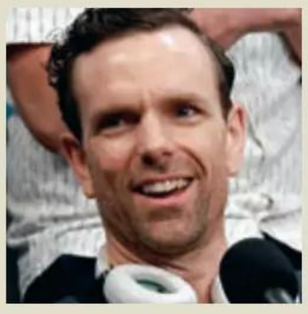
"*I don't know how a man decides what's right for his own life/It's all a mystery*", he muses in "Fight Test", while the symphonic swirl of "In The Morning Of The Magicians" sees him crooning, "*Oh, what is love and what is hate? And why does it matter?*"

"Ego Tripping At The Gates Of Hell", meanwhile, finds the singer pondering, "*I was waiting on a moment, but the moment never came*", over a tsunami of vocal samples, snatches of mellotron and burbling bass.

It's on the sublime "Do You Realize??", however, that Coyne hits metaphysical pay-dirt. A cathartic combination of melancholy and euphoria which implores the listener to revel in life's small wonders, its uplifting feel propelled it to No 32 in the UK, helping it become the band's most commercially successful album. The feel-good factor didn't end there: the album was made into a rock musical in 2012 – the definitive happy ending. ●

THREE KEY CHARACTERS IN THE MUSICAL VERSION BY DES McANUFF

YOSHIMI (KIMIKO GLENN)
A Japanese-American painter who battles cancer in the form of sci-fi robots



BEN (PAUL NOLAN)
Yoshimi's geeky, pork-pie-hatted boyfriend who gets the elbow for the more alpha love rival Booker

BOOKER (NIK WALKER)
Swarthy broker who wins Yoshimi's affections, only to struggle with her diagnosis

GETTY IMAGES

14

ARCADE FIRE
FUNERAL

MERGE, 2004

Canadian indie rock reaches stadium proportions. *By Peter Watts*

FUNERALS are not supposed to sound like this. Arcade Fire upturned convention in so many ways on this delirious debut, which saw the band come from nowhere – well, Montreal to be more precise – and sell half-a-million copies with a record that unapologetically aimed for the bleachers. Win Butler still had that classic indie-pop voice of tremulous concern, but the band produced music that was unusually orchestral, bold and proud, bringing Merge their biggest success and spawning five singles, including brilliant UK Top 20 hit "Rebellion (Lies)", which the band would perform live with David Bowie in 2005.

While Arcade Fire weren't the only band going down this road – The Killers and The Shins were both exploring a similarly wide-lens approach to traditional indie dynamics – none did so with as much sophistication or imagination. Fleet Foxes and War On Drugs would soon come along to maintain the mood, albeit in their own individual ways, while Arcade Fire's sound would inspire groups like Coldplay to dial everything up a notch. U2

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 33; US 123
PRODUCED BY: ARCADE FIRE
RECORDED AT: HOTEL2TANGO, MONTREAL

Arcade Fire, 2005: dialling indie dynamics up a notch

acknowledged the band's impact by co-opting "Wake Up" and using it as their intro music on the 2005-2006 Vertigo Tour.

But that's not Arcade Fire's fault. And it also does the band something of disservice because while Arcade Fire certainly understood how to inspire and even manipulate the emotions of their audience, the band also possessed a powerful ability to smuggle strange sounds, themes and lyrics into the mainstream. "Power Out" is a classic example, a massive anthem with an insanely catchy riff backed by a strange drone, glockenspiel and lyrics that tell the listener: "*Don't have any dreams/Don't have any plans*". "Un Anée Sans Lumière" is a gorgeous bilingual duet sung with Butler's wife, Regine Chassagne, who then wields a mean accordion on "Laika". This track sees Butler bellow his lyrics on a song that's named after the first creature in space, but which is really about family dysfunction.

None of this is straightforward or typical, but the overarching combination of sad and glad has Arcade Fire channelling something of Bruce Springsteen's ability to tie a depressing story to an uplifting melody, force-feeding serotonin direct to a confused brain. Opening number "Tunnels" has that in spades: an outstanding vocal melody, driving rhythm, strings and gargantuan singalong chorus, but all revolving around a story that begins with death and grieving parents. The theatricality barely lets up – bar, perhaps, the mid-tempo "Crown Of Love" and the country-hued "7 Kettles", although even these have moments that raise the heartbeat, as if the band can barely contain the surfeit of emotion.

While Butler dominates vocals, he hands the mic over to Chassagne on two of the most affecting numbers. "Haiti" is another bilingual number about her Haitian-born parents, while the closing song, "In The Backseat", is as profound and moving as anything on the album. It features Chassagne singing about growing up and passing on, with vocals, lyrics and music truly coalescing in a moment of heart-breaking intent and vulnerable honesty. ●

THREE FAMILY DEATHS THAT INSPIRED THE RECORD

REGINE CHASSAGNE'S GRANDMOTHER

Having struggled with Parkinson's, Regine's grandmother passed in June 2003, two months before Regine's marriage to Win Butler and the start of recording on their honeymoon in Trinidad and Tobago

ALVINO REY

Win and Will Butler's grandfather, a band leader in the 1940s, died aged 95 in February 2004

AUNT BETSY

In April 2004, multi-instrumentalist Richard Reed Parry lost his aunt Betsy

Regine Chassagne and Win Butler, 2005

WENDY REDFERN/REDFERNS; LEX VAN ROSSEN/MAI/REDFERNS

13

FLEET FOXES
FLEET FOXES

BELLA UNION, 2008

Squirrel chants. Ancient voices. Risky moves. A group from Seattle discover new territories.

By Alastair McKay

NEAR the start of their career, with just a six-song EP of demos to their name, Fleet Foxes issued an almost apologetic note to listeners who had sought them out. It was written from the viewpoint of a record buyer with just enough money to buy two or three CDs, a willingness to experiment, and a slightly jaded feeling about "New Rock Music".

"You'd rather hear a psychedelic haze, a Haight-Ashbury paranoid dirge, a Los Angeles folk-rock jangle – maybe you'll just stick to getting 1960s records. But a little cyst of guilt is growing in you – shouldn't you be exploring the new?"

While it's true that Fleet Foxes' self-titled debut (the working title was Ragged Wood) had hazy wafts of Haight-Ashbury or some mystical Californian canyon, its blend of pained poetry and delicious harmonies sounded entirely fresh on its release in June 2008.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 3; US 36

PRODUCED BY: PHIL EK

RECORDED AT: AVAST! RECORDING, SEATTLE; LONDON BRIDGE, SEATTLE

***"Ancient voices ringing soft"*: Fleet Foxes, 2008–(l–r) Christian Wargo, Skyler Skjelset, Casey Wescott, Nicholas Peterson, Robin Pecknold**

From the opening chant of "*red squirrel in the morning*" on "Sun It Rises" through the accidental Christmas carol of "White Winter Hymnal" to the winsome verses of "Oliver James", Robin Pecknold's band established a dislocated sense of time and place that sounded both ancient and modern. Chanting about squirrels is not a conventional way to open a rock album. Reimagining the story of the baby Moses, calling him Oliver, and relocating him to the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, is a startling way to close one. Pecknold often uses words as colour, and his book of lyrics does much to deflate pretension, but the line in "Oliver James" about "*the sound of ancient voices ringing soft upon your ear*" stands out as a shorthand description of Fleet Foxes' approach.

Timelessness doesn't just happen. The band's classicism incorporates an interest in English folk, stretching into Scandinavia, accessed through the sombre vocal traditions of Sacred Harp singing. Pecknold's subsequent explanations of the songs implies that they were experiments, or puzzles to be solved. Sometimes, his descriptions elude the finished song. The sombre odyssey of "Quiet Houses" is characterised with the question: "Can we blend Motown, barbershop, and Nintendo music?" The barbershop is just about audible, Nintendo not so much, Motown hardly at all.

But throwing an anthropological fire blanket over the music misses the point. Fleet Foxes' songs are exercises in emotional disorientation. The geography is imprecise, time and place are dissolved. Ragged Wood is just about right, and the song of the title is a joyous romp through a romantic glade. If this music has a religious impulse, it is the one handed down to Pecknold by his musician father, who imparted the history of the Beach Boys as if it was a divine creed. For Pecknold, Brian Wilson was a guiding light, and the whole character of Fleet Foxes can be located in their approach to vocal harmony. It's not about clinical perfection, as much as the beautiful tension of voices pulling in different directions. It's a pilgrimage in which an American band asked directions from English folk, got lost, and found themselves lighting campfires in an undiscovered land. ●

Robin Pecknold, Paris, November 2008

THREE GREAT FLEET FOXES SINGLES

WHITE WINTER HYMNAL (2008)

The debut single instantly sounded definitive of Fleet Foxes' lush, cavernous alt.folk. An unspoilt snowfield of a song

MYKONOS (2009)

But could they do sunny? The lead track from the "Sun Giant" EP certainly captured something of the Aegean siesta and nisiotika wedding party

HELPLESSNESS BLUES (2011)

The second album's title track summoned a gentle storm of Simon & Garfunkel acoustics and vast, land-working Americana

STEPHANE DE SAKUTIN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

12

PJ HARVEY
STORIES FROM THE CITY, STORIES FROM THE SEA
ISLAND, 2000

A streamlined, accessible trip into the world beyond her own headspace... Don't call it the New York album! *By Stephen Deusner*

WHEN PJ Harvey won the Mercury Prize for her fifth studio album, *Stories From The City, Stories From The Sea*, she was touring America and could not make it back to London for the ceremony. Instead, she accepted the award by phone, calling from her hotel room outside Washington, DC. Her remarks were sombre and somewhat bewildered: the date was September 11, 2001.

Even before she accepted the Mercury Prize, Harvey had adamantly insisted that *Stories From The City...* wasn't her New York album. As a result of the seismic cultural shift that followed the attacks, the album has become irrevocably so: a placemarker or a memory box of sorts: a postcard from a much different New York; a meditation on time and memory.

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 23; US 42

PRODUCED BY: ROB ELLIS, MICK HARVEY, PJ HARVEY

RECORDED AT: LINFORD MANOR, MILTON KEYNES

Storyteller: Polly Harvey Amsterdam, Netherlands, October 3,2000

Having spent time in the city filming Hal Hartley's *Book Of Life*, almost inevitably New York became the backdrop for an album about love and desire and loss. The city lent her lyrics a specific setting and gave them the scope of a novel. "*On a rooftop in Brooklyn, one in the morning*", she sings on "You Said Something". It's a love song, but she spends more time describing the view than she does describing her emotions.

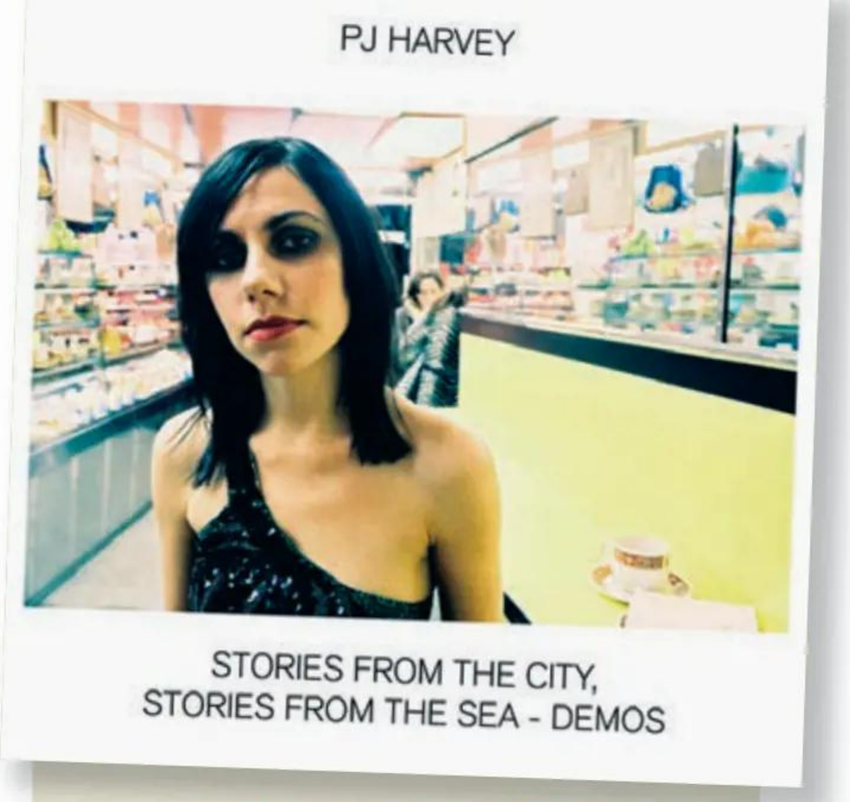
Where her previous albums were aggressively confessional, her lyrical style on this album is more observational, the impression is of songs written on the go: in coffeeshop queues or subway crowds, on street corners in stairwells or bedrooms. Harvey puts the listener deep in the heart of a city. "*I can't believe that life's so complex*", she asserts on the great "This Is Love", "*when I just want to sit here and watch you undress*".

Four albums in, Harvey was a mercurial artist, moving gracefully from wanton blues to gutter cabaret to lowdown punk. All of those disparate styles inform *Stories From The City, Stories From The Sea*, which at times sounds like a summation – almost daring you to guess what might come next.

But what of the second half of that title? There is no literal water in these songs, no seafaring exploits or centuries-old shanties. If the city is a place, then the sea is a non-place: the gulf in between Harvey and her lover, the thousands of kilometres between America (where she found inspiration) and England (where she set it to tape).

That non-place is the province of the final pair of songs, both relatively restrained and often eerie in their open-endedness. "We Float", particularly, is the most hopeful song Harvey had yet penned, an autopsy of a failed relationship that brooks no bitterness. Instead, she sounds generous as she recounts the traits and personal histories that made them attractive to one another and ultimately incompatible, before promising, "*One day we'll float/Take life as it comes*".

It's a beguiling sentiment, as plainspoken as it is open-ended, a calm realisation that the world – the pressure, the lovers, the travel, the art, and the world tragedies – remain beyond our control. ●



THREE GREAT *STORIES* DEMOS

BIG EXIT

PJH demos had historically packed a punch. All the drama is in place in this one, but enjoyable as it is, the machinery is tweaked for a more aerodynamic finish on the album version

THIS MESS WE'RE IN

More compelling and tricksy in this muddy, Thom-less trial version. Shows how fully the vision is in place at an early stage

YOU SAID SOMETHING

PJH's metonymic rooftop marvel showcases her guitar chop – Byrdsian folk blues meets Keith Levene and ready for the early 21st century

FRANS SCHELLEKENS/REDFERNS

11

YO LA TENGO
AND THEN NOTHING TURNED ITSELF INSIDE-OUT

MATADOR, 2000

Quiet is the new loud. New Jersey experimenters turn down and reap rewards. *By Peter Watts*

IF there's a moment that demonstrates the magnificence of *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside-Out*, it's the one where Yo La Tengo suddenly switch up from the restrained, intimate lo-fi pop that dominates the album to the gleeful "Cherry Chapstick". A tidal wave of energy that has been kept in check is suddenly unleashed. It's worth the wait, and the knowledge that "Cherry Chapstick" exists makes everything that precedes it even more impressive, as if the band were asking the listener to hold their breath, look deep inside themselves and focus on the moment.

At the time, *...Inside-Out* was something of a curveball. Yo La Tengo were mostly known for their invention and noise, with tracks like "The Hour Grows Late" from *Electr-O-Pura* or *I Can Hear The Heart Beating As One*'s gorgeous "Shadows" seen as outliers in their

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 79; US 138
PRODUCED BY: ROGER MOUTENOT
RECORDED AT: ALEX THE GREAT RECORDING, NASHVILLE

"When we'd play loud it just wasn't sticking": (l–r) Yo La Tengo's Georgia Hubley, James McNew and Ira Kaplan

catalogue. But ...*Inside-Out* turned that, well, inside out. Now slower, quiet songs dominated, with just that solitary rocker "Cherry Chapstick" to break the spell. This wasn't entirely deliberate. "It was never part of the plan to make a quiet record," Ira Kaplan later explained. "It seemed to keep happening that when we'd play loud it just wasn't sticking; if we played quiet, it was."

Kaplan thinks this might have been to do with the acoustics of a new rehearsal space in Hoboken, where they no longer had to compete with a bunch of other bands making a racket. ...*Inside-Out* was again recorded at Nashville's Alex The Great studio with Roger Moutenot, who they had worked with for 1993's *Painful*, their first Matador release. There are still occasional flurries of discordance, but these are now provided by piano or synth on "Saturday" or by the unsettling percussion of "Tired Hippo". More typical is the slowly unwinding, almost whispered "The Crying Of Lot G" or "Our Way To Fall", a beautiful love song from Kaplan to Georgia Hubley, and its response, a cover of "You Can Have It All", that has Hubley on lead vocals while Kaplan sings a cappella accompaniment. So many of these songs are about love and relationships, honest late-night confessionals that make the listener feel like an eavesdropper.

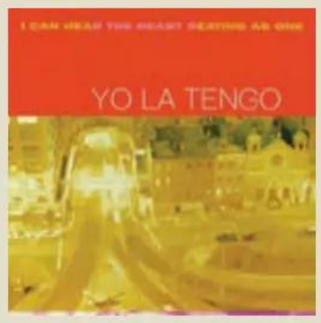
The curious arrangement of "You Can Have It All" and "Tired Hippo" show that the band's love of unorthodoxy and experimentation has not been dimmed by the change in tempo and volume. Now different instruments are deployed to create contrast, such as the cello of "From Black To Blue". "Last Days Of Disco" is a sombre meditation about high-school dances that features terrific percussion and bursts of what sounds like digeridoo but is probably vibraphone.

Alongside these subtle textural changes come more radical switches of emotion, from the album's many great love songs to the epic despair and empathy of "Tears Are In Your Eyes" and the personal emptiness of "From Black To Blue". It culminates in the epic sweep of "Night Falls On Hoboken", a stunning accomplishment that was recorded live and captures the buzzing torment of a sleepless night before finding resolution by slowly burning itself out, leaving an unsettling quiet. ●

THREE OTHER GREAT YLT ALBUMS

PAINFUL (MATADOR, 1993)
An early indication of Yo La versatility. Large quietness shown to be a quality alongside the trio's thoughtful Velvets grooves

ELECTR-O-PURA (MATADOR, 1995)
The band showed how they could turn their hand to delightful pop like "Tom Courtenay". But really it was the grooves like "False Alarm" and "Blue Line Swinger" which won the day



I CAN HEAR THE HEART...
(MATADOR, 1997)
The band hold pop and experimentation in cosmic balance. Wallflower anthem "Autumn Sweater" meanwhile was the greatest Stereolab song never written. Lovely

MATADOR PRESS

10

PRIMAL SCREAM
XTRMNTR
CREATION, 2000

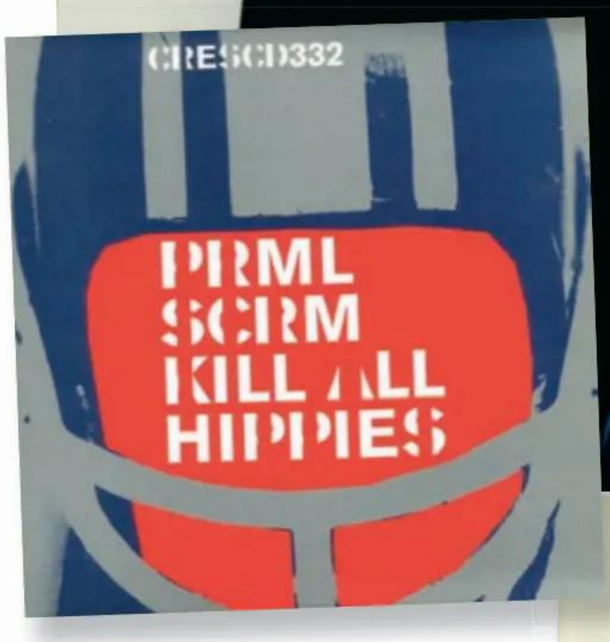
A dystopian masterpiece. The Scream's sixth album saw them reinvent rock as war.
By Paul Moody

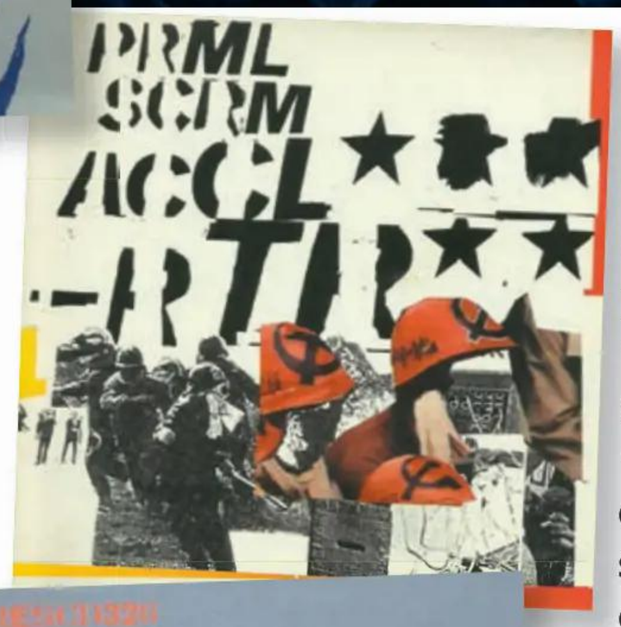
AT the turn of the century, Primal Scream's metamorphosis from Stones-obsessed rock apologists to electro-punk commissars was still very much a work in progress. 1997's sonically haphazard *Vanishing Point* had certainly flagged up their intention to speed fearlessly down new aural highways, but it was only three years later that they arrived at their destination.

A turbo-charged assault on the senses, *XTRMNTR* was as lean and mean as its vowel-free title suggested. Dense, musically uncompromising and lyrically splenetic – opener "Kill All Hippies"' couplet "*Subvert normality/Fuck you!*" sums up the mood – it was the sound of the Scream applying napalm to the corpse of pop history, their disgust at everything from pop to multinational corporations spelled out by Bobby Gillespie in the album's press

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 3; US –
PRODUCED BY: BRENDAN LYNCH, PRIMAL SCREAM, JAGZ KOONER, DAVID HOLMES, HUGO NICOLSON, THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS, KEVIN SHIELDS, TIM HOLMES, DAN THE AUTOMATOR
RECORDED AT: THE BUNKER, PRIMROSE HILL, LONDON

Fighting fit: (l–r) Robert 'Throb' Young, Bobby Gillespie, Gary 'Mani' Mountfield and Martin Duffy greet the new millennium





notes: "I don't think I'm invigorated by any culture. I think I'm disgusted by what passes for culture."

Where its predecessor lacked direction, this follow-up came roaring out of the speakers, hot-wiring disparate elements – post-punk, dub, free jazz – into an hour-long blast of musical electro-shock therapy. The route map for this sonic Valhalla can be traced to the recruitment of former Stone Rose Gary 'Mani' Mounfield to the live lineup two years earlier. Having added drummer Darrin Mooney at the bassist's suggestion, the new-look band – augmented by My Bloody Valentine's Kevin Shields for a US tour – road-tested new material in time-honoured fashion.

Back at their Primrose Hill studio (nicknamed 'The Bunker'), Bobby Gillespie and Andrew Innes' magpie instincts ran riot – the duo enlisting a who's who of independent dance-rock to help them fulfil their nihilistic vision. Kevin Shields and Bernard Sumner apply a scorched-guitar policy to "Accelerator" and "Shoot Speed/Kill Light" respectively, while a synapse-shredding mix of "Swastika Eyes" (one of two versions of the song on the album) comes courtesy of The Chemical Brothers (returning the favour as Gillespie had sung on the latter's "Out Of Control"). A queasy "Pills", meanwhile – produced by Dan The Automator – finds Gillespie intoning "*Fuck fuck/Sick fuck*" over the song's outro.

When the storm clouds eventually break, the effect is stunning. Written by Mani, a sublime "Keep Your Dreams" feels as restorative as sunshine amidst the darkness. However, the sense that the Scream had touched a collective nerve with this dystopian masterpiece is undeniable. A Top 5 album on release In January 2000, the accompanying tour saw the band preview a song entitled "Bomb The Pentagon". The times were about to change, but the Scream had already delivered their own 9/11. ●

THR KY INFLNCS N XTRMNTR

CURTIS MAYFIELD
Curtis's music knew its way around an urban hellscape, and it's a melodic lodestar for the Scream's own dystopian vision. You got the soul!

NEU!
If the Chemical Brothers played Krautrock it would have sounded like "Shoot Speed/Kill Light" – where the Scream took the Dinger groove to full power.

MC5
Kevin Shields and MBV were spiritual leaders on the record. Brother Wayne and Fred "Sonic" Smith still inspired them to kick out the jams.

TERRY RICHARDSON; GETTY IMAGES

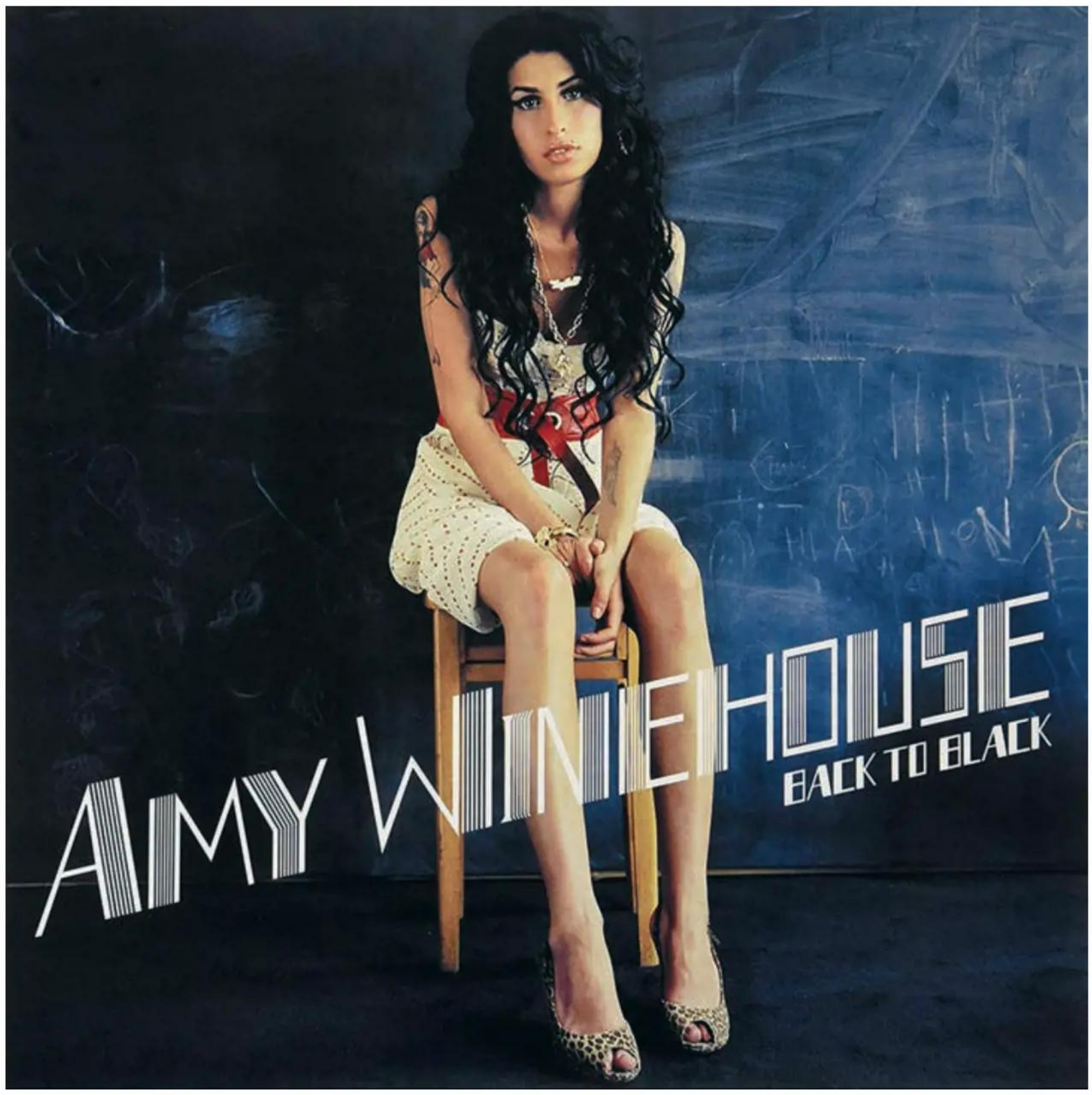
9

AMY WINEHOUSE
BACK TO BLACK
ISLAND, 2006

She told you she was trouble. Amy sings her life.
By Peter Watts

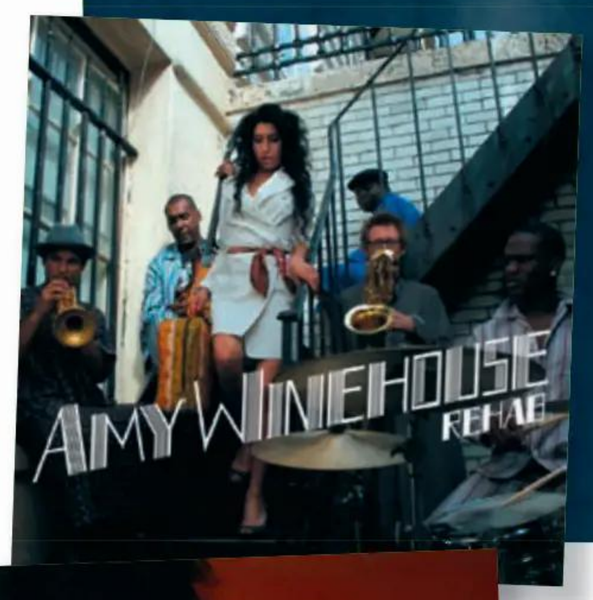
THE great voices of early-21st-century pop all belonged to women. There was Rihanna and Beyoncé and Adele, but most of all there was Amy Winehouse. *Frank* had been a super debut, but *Back To Black* blew aside all expectations, with Winehouse's powerful, versatile voice cutting through the noise on an album crammed with classic soul-fused, Spector-like heartbreak ballads. "Back To Black", "Love Is A Losing Game" and "You Know I'm No Good" sounded as if they had been around for decades, and it would be easy to mistake this for a contemporary set of deep soul covers from the 1960s rather than new compositions written and recorded in the 2000s by a woman from north London in her early twenties.

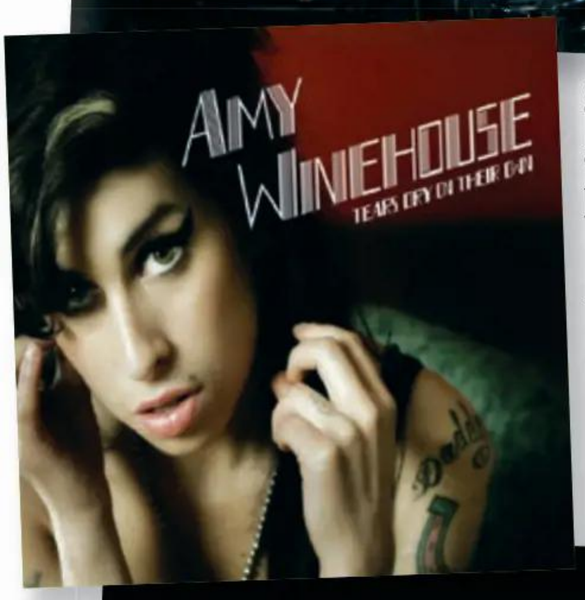
Winehouse wrote most of the songs herself, drawing on a turbulent personal life that made her fodder for the tabloids and provided rich material for her songs. She stared down her demons with admirable honesty, unstintingly and unsentimentally picking at the scabs and airing grievances in painful detail. In the studio, she worked with producers

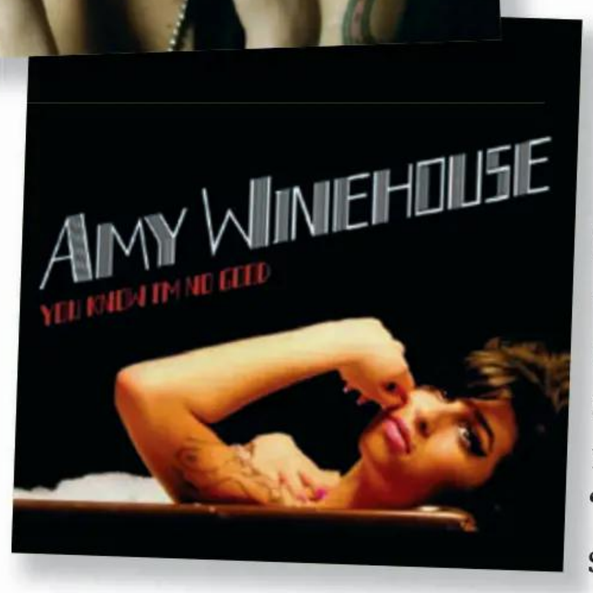


HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 2
PRODUCED BY: SALAAM REMI, MARK RONSON
RECORDED AT: INSTRUMENT ZOO, MIAMI; DAPTONE, ALLIDO, CHUNG KING (ALL NEW YORK); METROPOLIS, LONDON

Black on blue: at Joe's Pub, New York, Jan 16, 2007







Salaam Remi and the little-known Mark Ronson, as well as the Dap-Kings, Sharon Jones' backing band. It's the Dap-Kings who can be heard on opening track and in many ways the album's signature moment, "Rehab", a spirited mix of vintage soul with modern production techniques. Winehouse's deep voice contrasts with the lightness of the arrangement's timpani and bells, before combining with the horns and percussion to create an undeniable rush. But it's the defiance in her lyrics that really drives the song home, as Winehouse stubbornly, recklessly refuses the help being offered to her. In "Rehab", there is no hiding place, and Winehouse doesn't want one.

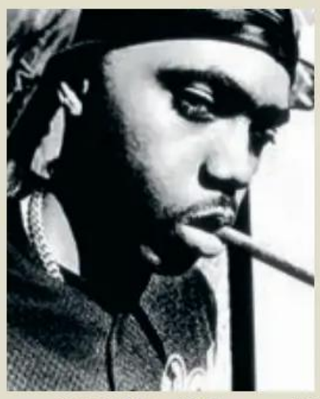
It's clear from "Rehab" that Winehouse plans to make herself the central figure of the domestic drama that unfolds. "You Know I'm No Good" embodies the album's stunning fusion of old and new, with clipped and treated drums, oodles of echo and a wicked swing as Winehouse confesses to personal failures and infidelities. "Me And Mr Jones" sounds like 1950s jazz blues only with a lyric that references Slick Rick and asks, "*What kind of fuckery is this?*"

The stripped-back "Love Is A Losing Game" is one of the great lovesick ballads of all time, with Winehouse's vocal more exposed and vulnerable than anywhere else on the album. "Tears Dry On Their Own", "Back To Black", "Some Unholy War" – the recrimination and blame just keeps on coming, the message sugared by waves of horns and girl-group reverb.

Back To Black's killer tunes and unbridled honesty made for an unstoppable package, one free of irony or ambiguity that harked back to a different time in music – another of the notable things about *Back To Black* is its brevity, with the album lasting just 35 minutes, as tight and on-point as *Lady Soul*, *Blue* or *Tapestry*.

It spanned four hit singles and five Grammys, selling more than 16 million copies around the world, and made Winehouse an international star. Following Winehouse's death in 2011, it remains her crowning accomplishment. ●

THREE MUSICIANS MENTIONED IN *BLACK TO BLACK*

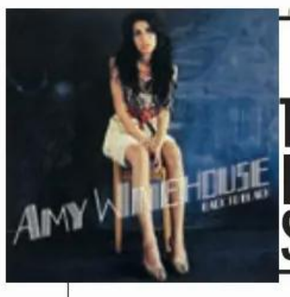


"MR JONES"
Illmatic made Nasir Jones his generation's most felicitous and forensic MC – Amy sampled him on her previous album, *Frank*. Nas worked with Amy and used unrecorded material on 2013's "Cherry Wine".

"MR HATHAWAY"
Singer Donny Hathaway [1945-1979] is referenced in "Rehab". Nas and Amy briefly worked on a Hathaway cover during a studio session.

"RAY"
Amy would rather be at home listening to Ray Charles than in group therapy, she says in "Rehab".

JOHN RICARD/FILMMAGIC;GETTY IMAGES



THE INNER SLEEVE ...INSIDE THE ALBUM

"There were no secrets with her. She was deadly honest"

THE MAKING OF... "BACK TO BLACK" BY AMY WINEHOUSE

Studio insiders tell *Uncut* about the making of the devastating title track of Amy Winehouse's *Back To Black*. "That record holds a special place," hears Kate Solomon. "I think it is one of the best records I've ever worked on."

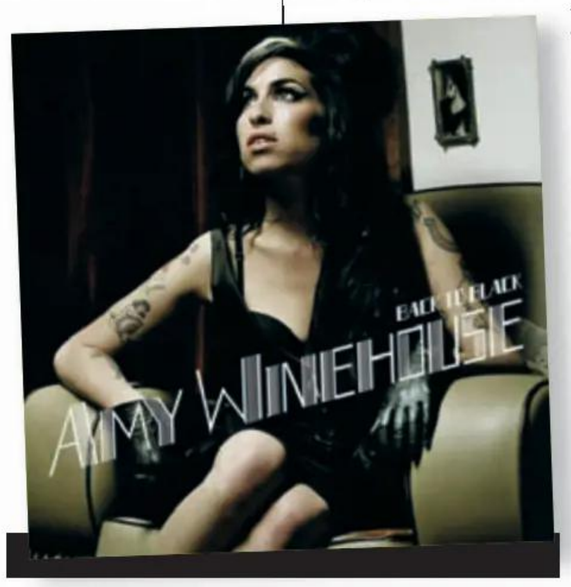
UNCUT 08.2021

WE remember Amy Winehouse now as a towering icon of popular culture, a tragic totem of natural talent in an unfeeling world – but back in 2005 she was just another young singer flitting in and out of the public eye. Those eyeliner swooshes were mere wingettes, her beehive in larval form. She'd released *Frank* two years earlier and enjoyed the first flushes of fame in the UK but was little known in America, where *Frank* would not even get a release until 2007. When she wasn't contractually obliged to be on stage, Amy would be holding court in Camden pubs, revelling in the attention and falling hard, fast and very publicly for Blake Fielder-Civil.

What she wasn't doing much of was writing. She'd gained a bit of a reputation for procrastinating at this point. "We heard from Salaam [Remi, who produced most of *Frank*] saying that she just always took so long to write," says assistant engineer Mike Makowski, dragging out his O's for dramatic effect.

But two things happened that sped the creative process along. First, she had her heart broken by Fielder-Civil. Second, she met Mark Ronson. Winehouse realised she had a musical kinship with the young producer; she knew that she wanted a '60s girl-group sound, while Ronson had an ear for a hook and an affection for vintage studio equipment. The pair famously came up with "Rehab" while wandering down a New York street. But the devastating, funereal "Back To Black" would come together bit by bit.

Binky Griptite, former guitarist with the Dap-Kings, remembers Ronson turning up to the studio with a CD packed with "little recordings of the tunes and the chords and whatnot", and a vision for the song developed throughout the sessions: the first was in the Daptone Studios in Bushwick, Brooklyn, before Amy laid down her vocals at Chung King Studios in Manhattan. Finally, the orchestration was added at Metropolis in London.



"She was the life of the party and funny as hell"

HOMER STEINWEISS

The result was spectacular. Even 15 years later, there's something quietly majestic in the song's melodrama. The video, directed by Phil Griffin, feels eerily prophetic when seen from the standpoint of 2021: Amy leads a funeral procession to a headstone that reads "RIP The Heart of Amy Winehouse".

Back To Black launched Amy into the stratosphere. She became a household name on both sides of the Atlantic and was forced to contend with all the unwanted press attention that brought. Though no-one knew it at the time, it was to be her swansong. She passed away in her Camden home from alcohol poisoning on July 10, 2011. But "Back To Black" stands as a classic, a song and album that continue to strike chords with fans who were then too young to be aware of Amy herself. "Even though I didn't really know it would become a classic," drummer Homer Steinweiss says of the song, "I kind of felt it."

BINKY GRIPTITE [guitar]: Amy working with Mark seemed like a last-minute, surprise thing. He was

KEY PLAYERS

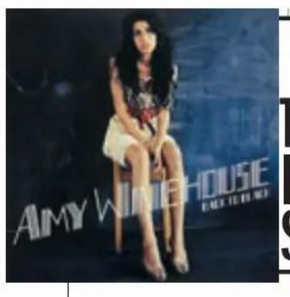
Homer Steinweiss
Drums

Binky Griptite
Guitar

Mike Makowski
Assistant engineer

Chris Elliott
Orchestral arrangement

MISCHA RICHTER; SCOTT DUDELSON/GETTY IMAGES FOR COACHELLA; EARL GIBSON III/WIREIMAGE



working on his own record and put it aside to do hers, it seemed.

HOMER STEINWEISS [drums]: Mark had been working with the Dap-Kings' horn section for a Robbie Williams album, I think, or something like that. Then when Mark started working with Amy, he was like, "Man, I could use like a whole band on this kind of sound."

GRIPTITE: We said OK but we didn't really think much of it. I mean, nobody knew that it was gonna be so huge. I was actually convinced that she would never make it. I couldn't imagine somebody with a name like Wine... house? Not a rock-star name to me. I was just like, "She's never gonna make it."

MIKE MAKOWSKI [assistant engineer]: I worked at Chung King studios in New York. I started interning there – you had to pretty much work eight months for free, four 12-hour shifts a week. I'd just started getting in on all the sessions at the time when Mark started working with Amy.

GRIPTITE: I noticed that she was really into kids. She would always have to ask me about my daughter. "How's your likkle one?" I brought my daughter to soundcheck once, and even though Amy was tired of singing "Rehab", when I requested it for my daughter she just smiled, said "No problem" and went right into it. That was cool.

MAKOWSKI: Between her and Mark, they're so laid-back. He would literally come in a white undershirt that looked like he just woke up in it. "Hey, what's up?" Amy, the only thing she was always saying was, "I can't wait to get home to my Blakey."

STEINWEISS: She was really sweet and really great. When she was here she was a blast. She was the life of the party and just funny as hell.

GRIPTITE: There were no secrets with her though – she was deadly honest in that way. You knew what mood she was in.

MAKOWSKI: Oh, I got to be honest with you, I thought maybe she was a new artist because she literally looked like... well, I looked at her shoes. I was like, "Man, you gotta get this girl some shoes or something?" They were busted out – what the hell! She was probably just like, "Who cares?" Her and Mark were just so chill.

STEINWEISS: We recorded at Daptone Studios – it's a house in Bushwick turned into a recording studio. The back room was a live room and in the middle there was a drum booth. If you want to really isolate your drums, the only actual way to do that is to have a room that is completely floated. Usually that's done with specific types of rubber and you need specific types of weight. But Gabe [Roth, co-founder of Daptone Records] was just like, "Yeah, but tyres would work even better." And he went down the block and found a bunch of tyres and put them in.

GRIPTITE: Mark had said it was on that girl-group vibe, Shangri-Las, and all that. We didn't do the whole Phil Spector thing, it wasn't like a giant wall of sound. It's the intersection between soul music and girl-group style.

STEINWEISS: On "Back To Black", I think it was all pretty much in the demo. The drum beat was there and the sections were kind of there. The input we had was more in providing the feeling and the sound to complete the parts.

GRIPTITE: When we started tracking "Back To Black", there wasn't much space for me, sonically. So I was at a bit of a loss for what to play. I just wound up improvising for the whole song. I didn't know how it was gonna get used or if I was playing too much. Mark left me off of the front half of the song and then brought me in towards the middle through to the end. So I was the one playing all this surfy, single-note guitar stuff.

CHRIS ELLIOTT: The guitar part had made me think of Ennio Morricone's spaghetti westerns – he's one of my biggest heroes and there was just something of that in the middle section. Lots of latitude and this atmospheric, passionate, filmic feel.

STEINWEISS: It's a very simple drum pattern but it's actually one of the hardest things for me to do in a session. It's like a shuffle and I don't really do a lot of those, so I was happy that it was so simple. The simpler it is, the easier it is for me to keep the shuffle going.

GRIPTITE: Mark has good instincts in the studio. He knows what he's looking for. Or even if he doesn't necessarily know what he's looking for, he always knows when it's not it. We don't waste a lot of time going in the wrong direction. He is really good at knowing when to guide us versus when to just let us do our own thing.

MAKOWSKI: All the music the Dap-Kings recorded was at a different studio. But it was recorded on one-inch 16-track reel-to-reel tape. So at Chung King, we would have to rent whatever that tape machine was and then Mark would bring in the tapes and I would basically run

FACT FILE

Released
October 27, 2006
Written by:
Amy Winehouse; Mark Ronson
Produced by:
Mark Ronson
Recorded at:
Daptone Studios, Chung King Studios (NYC), Metropolis Studios (London)
Highest Chart position: UK 8; US 19
Personnel includes: Amy Winehouse (vocals), Binky Griptite (guitars), Nick Movshon (bass), Homer Steinweiss (drums), Chris Elliott (orchestral arrangements), Victor Axelrod (piano), Chris Tombling, Warren Zielinsky, Everton Nielsen (violin), Jon Thorne, Katie Wilkinson, Rachel Bott (viola), Andy Mackintosh (alto sax), Jamie Talbot (tenor sax), Dave Bishop (baritone sax) Frank Ricotti (percussion)

BARNEY BRITTON/REDFERNS

***"And I tread a troubled track"*: Winehouse at Koko, north London, November 14, 2006**

the tapes through the big Neve board and then into Pro Tools. It was a stylistic decision, I guess, getting that type of old-school Motown sound off the tape. All the songs were written in this way that you literally could hit record, she would sing the song all the way through, done. Mark would say, "OK, that was amazing." Amy would reply, "Mark, I'll sing it through one more time because I know you'd like to have a comp." But it was the first take, every time. With Amy, I don't even think we tuned any of her vocals – maybe the tiniest little bit.

GRIPTITE: I didn't necessarily get the impression that the subject matter or anything was hard for her to sing. The only thing I noticed was she was pretty bored of singing "Rehab".

MAKOWSKI: We recorded "Back To Black" last out of the five songs we did – just so she wasn't upset. I wouldn't say she was ever visibly upset, but you want to start off with the happier songs. I remember we turned the lights way down for that and "Love Is A Losing Game".

ELLIOTT: Mark Ronson, Darcus [Beese, from Island Records] and Tom [Elmhirst] heard the mixes and felt there could be another colour in the tracks. They didn't want it to come from the same sound world as *Frank*. Tom mentioned strings. Amy wasn't really a fan of the idea of strings. In fact she said very, very bluntly to Mark, "I don't want any facking strings on the record."

I had no idea or expectation about Mark. I threw down some quick ideas. Mark breezed in, really charming. We went through each song, twice. I had them in Logic and he just literally edited out a few notes. When Mark was leaving, he said, "Oh, by the way, before I forget – Amy really hates strings." I said, "We'll keep it low and treme." So low as in pitch and treme as in tremolando, which is where the strings are almost shaking or shivering. It's a spooky kind of sound.

The strings went really high in the middle section of "Back To Black". I'm very much a film-

> "Amy said very, very bluntly to Mark, 'I don't want any facking strings on the record'"
> CHRIS ELLIOTT

centric composer and love getting all the atmosphere in. When I say the strings went higher at that point, they just went to a tension – soft, but they're there. Say if it was in a movie, it would be: "What's going to happen now, who's going to come in the door?"

We recorded the strings at Metropolis, which is a slightly unusual place to record something like this. There are quite hard surfaces. You wouldn't get many producers wanting to do strings in there, because the sounds are quite hard and the reflections are really strong and difficult. But it's not unlike some of the studios that would have been around in the '60s. I think it was probably part of Mark's genius that he did that, he knew that would work.

With Mark Ronson at the Brit Awards, Earls Court, London, February 2008

STEINWEISS: I feel like Mark's role in making that record, whether or not he came up with a sound or anything, was putting the right people together. By putting Amy with the Dap-Kings and using her songs, then finding that sound with the band, I think that was a very big contribution to the success of the record and how good the record ended up being.

ELLIOTT: We did a big percussion session after the strings – just filled the studio with all these different percussion instruments. The percussion guy we used was called Frank, who was quite a workmanlike chap, a little cockney. We were using the timpani, so I said, "Can you just play the bass part?" He found he could tune the timps to be the five notes in the bass part. It dawned on him that we were going to do the whole song. He said to me, "This isn't what you do with timps – they're just for punctuation. It's not the whole thing!" It would be just in the background, behind the real bass. So you wouldn't really even hear it fully, it would just be like an aura. It was lovely, because when you hit those drums, softly I mean, it's a lovely wide sound. It adds a sort of majesty to it.

I really wanted to put a tubular bell in there, which I did. And when it came back, the producer was really excited, kept saying to me, "They absolutely love it. They love that it sounds like a film score, but they really loved the bells of death!" When I heard it for the very first time I thought, 'It feels like it's telling this story, like a movie or something.' So I'm sure she would've thought, 'These aren't the strings I thought I was gonna get.' I don't think the strings would be on the record if she hadn't liked it.

STEINWEISS: I've worked on a lot of records and a lot of records that I'm really proud of. But that record holds like a special place: I think it is one of the best records I've ever worked on. Any other session, no matter how good it is, we'll compare it to that. ●

Kate Solomon's biography, *Amy Winehouse*, is published by Orion

TIMELINE

September 14, 1983 Amy Winehouse is born in north London
2003 Now with 19 Management, Amy releases her first album, the jazz-tinged *Frank* with Salaam Remi on production duties
2004 Amy and Salaam win an Ivor Novello award for "Stronger Than Me"
2005 She meets Mark Ronson and the two collaborate on six tracks for *Back To Black*
April 30, 2007 The song "Back To Black" is released in the UK
2008 Amy wins a record-tying five Grammys for *Back To Black*
July 23, 2011 Amy is found dead in her Camden home

JMENTERNATIONAL/GETTYIMAGES

8

SUFJAN STEVENS
ILLINOISE

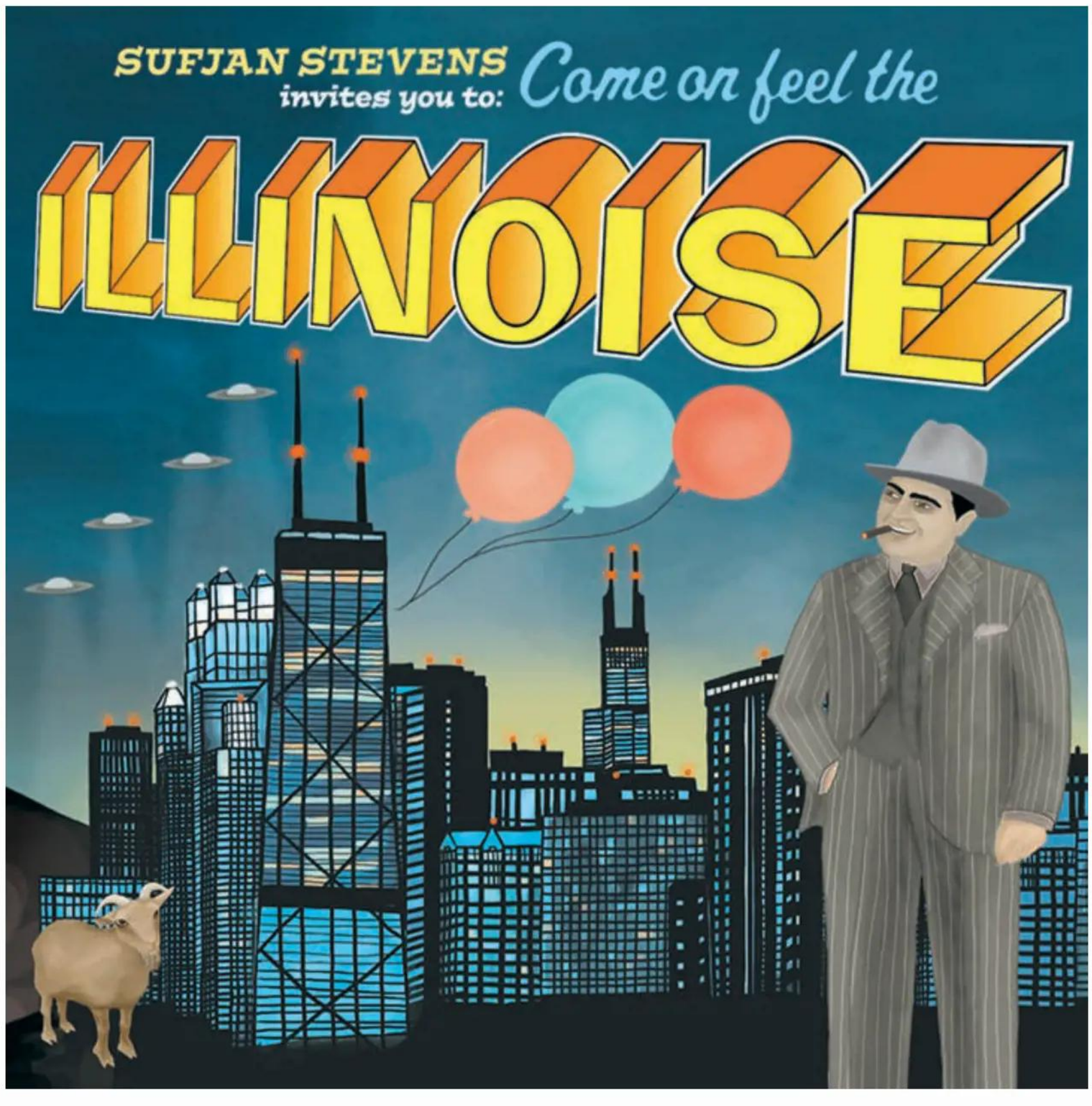
ASTHMASTIC KITTY, 2005

Second, classic instalment of Sufjan's mooted '50 States' project. *By Andy Gill*

IT took a breathtaking leap of aesthetic faith to propose a project like Sufjan Stevens' 50 States. Not even Yes or Magma at their most hubristic could match the ambition of Stevens' conception: a song-cycle of 50 albums, each concerning an individual American state.

Nor was *Illinoise* a succession of limp travelogues and familiar town songs like "Sweet Home Chicago", either. Stevens' albums are idiosyncratic collections of mini-operettas, musings upon historical figures and legends, evocations of architecture, skylines and landscapes, ruminations upon localised industrial development. All are rendered in a weird, pan-stylistic blend of alt.country, minimalism and American brass band music, as if John Philip Sousa, Steve Reich and Bonnie "Prince" Billy had together stumbled across the clippings file of some Midwest small-town newspaper and decided to set it to music.

This began with 2003's *Michigan*, his home state. After diligent researching of the relevant atlases, almanacs and biographies, he arrived at Michigan's neighbour Illinois.



HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 124; US 121

PRODUCED BY: SUFJAN STEVENS

RECORDED AT: THE BUDDY PROJECT, ASTORIA, QUEENS, NYC; VARIOUS OTHER NYC STUDIOS

State of grace: Sufjan Stevens (top) with the Noisemakers, 2005

A key track in establishing the general tone is "Come On! Feel The Illinoise!", whose punning title hides a rumbustious blend of piano, percussion and horns bustling along at some quirky tempo.

Individual towns are treated in a variety of ways. With a gentle piano and strings intro giving way to shambling banjo and guitar, "Jacksonville" is a heart-warming statement of faith in small-town cosiness: "*I've seen things that are meant to save/The bandstand chairs, and the Dewey Day Parade/I go out to the Golden H/The spirit is right, and the spirit doesn't change*".

Set to lolloping banjo, guitar and accordion, "Decatur, Or, Round of Applause for Your Step-Mother!" mainly provides an opportunity to nonsense-rhyme the location with terms like alligator, hate her, data and aviator, as in a children's nursery rhyme, ultimately establishing that "*Abraham Lincoln was the great emancipator*" before concluding in round form with a series of staggered line repetitions.

"Chicago", by contrast, is a much more personal piece, Stevens recalling romantic stays in that city, and subsequently his current home of New York, that helped him grow as a person: "*I was in love with the place/In my mind/I made a lot of mistakes/In my mind*". The only industry here is all in the arrangement, the youthful optimism summed up in the massed chorus and strings chugging along eagerly like a train.

Less happily remembered is "John Wayne Gacy, Jr", the serial killer's legend recounted over delicate piano and guitar. Stevens manages to maintain a sort of mottled musical consistency throughout, applying his various tones, timbres and textures in the manner of an abstract painter, so that a splash of crunching rock guitar in "The Man Of Metropolis Steals Our Hearts" is balanced six tracks away by the mournful piano and spooky lowing of "The Seer's Tower".

Illinois is an extraordinary achievement, all the more so when one considers that besides researching and writing the album, Stevens also played most of the parts himself. And if he could be so inspired by a relatively unremarkable state such as this, just imagine what might await should he ever reach Tennessee, Louisiana and California. ●

THREE ILLINOIS LANDMARKS AND PEOPLE MENTIONED

HIGHLAND
Site of a UFO sighting by three police officers, who witnessed a large triangular object with three lights flying at night.

JOHN WAYNE GACY, JR
Chicago-based serial killer dubbed the "Killer Clown", responsible for at least 33 murders between 1972 and 1978.

CASIMIR PULASKI
Polish nobleman and military commander nicknamed "The Soldier Of Liberty" who was honoured with a "Casimir Pulaski Day" state holiday in Illinois for saving George Washington's life in the American revolutionary War.

GETTY IMAGES

7

BON IVER
FOR EMMA, FOREVER AGO

JAGJAGUWAR, 2008

For solo album read "completely isolated album". Justin Vernon creates a generational sound.
By Peter Watts

IT says a lot about *For Emma, Forever Ago* that it can stand up against its own mythology. The founding story is remarkable – "part *Walden*, part Unabomber" as one reviewer put it – but *For Emma, Forever Ago* was able to thrive on its own merits by offering intimate explorations of the inner soul that are beautifully performed and brilliantly recorded.

Opener "Flume" is so personal you can hear Justin Vernon's voice crack and guitar creak as its strings hum with feedback. That atmosphere is sustained across the album's nine tracks, during which Vernon creates a milestone in home recording while bringing a new sophistication to indie folk that would inspire countless artists.

For Emma, Forever Ago was born when Justin Vernon took himself off to his father's secluded hunting cabin in northwestern Wisconsin in 2006. Vernon had no intention to

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
UK 42; US 64

PRODUCED BY:
JUSTIN VERNON

RECORDED AT:
HUNTING CABIN, WISCONSIN

Bon voyage: Justin Vernon. Below: the original self-released CD of *For Emma...*

record an album, much less become a star. He was physically ill and suffering from something like a psychological breakdown, believing himself washed up at 25, without a band, a girlfriend or a job. After a few weeks he began to write and record, exploring his state of mind with songs informed by the wildness of his surroundings.

Over the next three months, he reinvented himself as Bon Iver – the name a corruption of "bon hiver", or "good winter", a greeting used on *Northern Exposure*. *For Emma, Forever Ago* was initially released on Myspace, then self-released on CD [*right*] and eventually given wider exposure through Jagjaguwar, where it started to sell, slowly and then all at once.

It felt that alone in Wisconsin, Vernon had the confidence to become more true to his real self. That included embracing a vocal approach that saw him effect a vulnerable falsetto and a musical style that brought soulful elements to his landscape of indie folk. Vernon demonstrated creativity and imagination while working with a limited palate: this is not just one man and his guitar, but one man, his guitar and a laptop.

On "Lump Sum" he layers his own vocal, creating a powerful and punchy instrument that sits on top of scratchy guitar. On "The Wolves (Act I And III)" he gets even more inventive, overdubbing vocals and guiding the song towards a rich climax of guitars, firework percussion and a one-man choir of falsetto-singing non sequiturs. In the stark surroundings, even the simple whistles of "Team" provide an enriching supporting role.

Such textural innovations are supported by additional instruments, such as the subtle percussion of "Flume" and the sullen horns that introduce the beautiful gospel-like "For Emma". But Vernon knows when to leave things alone. "Skinny Love" is the stand-out in this aspect, as he drops the falsetto for some of the album's most direct lyrics and deploys a vocal melody that needs no clever production to make an impact. It's the track that helped break the album, and it's the one that confirmed Bon Iver was a singular talent with a musical vision that would see him work with everybody from Taylor Swift to Kanye West. ●

THREE FUTURE GUEST SPOTS SECURED BY *FOR EMMA...*

"MONSTER" – KANYE WEST (2010)

While also singing on "Lost In The World" from Kanye's fifth album *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, which sampled his song "Woods", Vernon joined Jay-Z, Rick Ross and Nicki Minaj for the album's devilish third single

"EXILE" – TAYLOR SWIFT (2020)

When Swift decided to go indie folk for her 2020 *Folklore* album, Vernon was one of the most natural names to emerge as potential collaborator on this piano-led lament

"WEIRD GOODBYES" – THE NATIONAL (2022)

Brothers in ennui, Vernon and The National released this subtle electro-flecked ballad as a one-off single in 2022, eventually finding a place in the second National album of 2023, *Laugh Track*

6

WILCO
YANKEE HOTEL FOXTROT

NONESUCH, 2001

Wilco's first, irony-laden masterpiece. So good, Time Warner bought it twice. *By Rob Hughes*

IT'S deeply ironic that Wilco came of age at the very moment their record label lost faith. The tortured birth of *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* can be seen as a modern parable about the uneasy relationship between art and commerce. As Jeff Tweedy solemnly noted, "The people charged with helping us find an audience didn't have any clue what we were working toward."

Whatever that was, it was something new. Tweedy's involvement in the Chicago's Noise Pop Festival in May 2000 led to a session with leftfield producer/composer Jim O'Rourke and drummer Glenn Kotche, the trio improvising an acoustic set of longform folk pieces that used drones as textural drift. Tweedy now had the taste for something more experimental than the sophisticated pop of *Summerteeth*.

There were casualties and tensions, all caught by documentarian Sam Jones. The fastidious Jay Bennett was increasingly at odds with Tweedy, who craved spontaneity. Bennett had initially been earmarked as engineer, along with Chris Brickley, but Tweedy

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 40; US 13

PRODUCED BY: WILCO

RECORDED AT: THE LOFT, CHICAGO

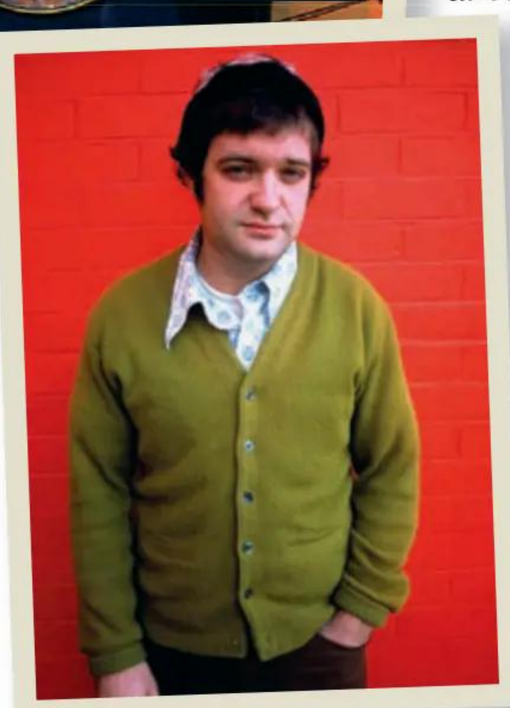
Wilco at the Riviera Theater in Chicago, November 2001: (l–r) Jeff Tweedy, Leroy Bach, Glenn Kotche, John Stirratt

also invited Jim O'Rourke to the party.

The paradox amid all this is that *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* is primarily about communication, with Wilco using shortwave radio static as a thematic device, knitting songs together or else pulling them apart. It's a very literal motif: we're trying to understand each other, but static of one kind or another gets in the way. So it is in the album: inviting melodies fizzle into white noise; beautiful chord progressions are ransacked by jarring tape echo.

Tweedy's songs were personal but elusive too. The gorgeous "I Am Trying To Break Your Heart" appears to cast a hex on a lost lover, though the subtext suggests that the only heart he can shatter is his own. Both "Ashes Of American Flags" and "I'm The Man Who Loves You", on a basic level, are throwbacks to Wilco's rootsier days – even though the former is interrupted by stray sounds, including a backwards sample of Stravinsky. There's a great hillbilly country song at the heart of "I'm The Man Who Loves You", with punchy horns and harmonies. Wilco choose to shift it closer to home instead, its atonal guitar and nervy dissonance planted firmly in the sensory din of an urban metropolis.

Jay Bennett and Jim O'Rourke



No-one at Time Warner could understand it. Reprise president Howie Klein, Wilco's major champion, had been made redundant, and the album was rejected. Wilco refused to make any changes, and after weeks of buy-out negotiations, Reprise eventually gave the band free rights to the recordings. With over 25 labels showing interest, the band sat on *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* for six months, before finally deciding to sign with Nonesuch. The label was another subsidiary of Time Warner. Ironically enough for an album they had rejected, the parent company had effectively bought it twice.

Reprise's decision to pass on *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* is as unfathomable now as it was then. Certainly the record-buying public weren't spooked by it. It reached 13 in the charts, selling over half a million copies. ●

THREE GREAT VERSIONS FROM THE *UNCUT* CD, *CROSSEYED STRANGERS, AN ALTERNATE YANKEE HOTEL FOXTROT*

I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART

From Tweedy's 2017 solo album *Together At Last* a super soft and lovely version showing his strong picking

WAR ON WAR

Appalachian moonshine in the veins of this speedy banjo- heavy version. You can't hide the aching changes though, however fast you play

JESUS, ETC

Super-mellow live take from 2022. Wilco meets Dexys in a wash of violin on a track exclusive to the *Uncut* CD. Try and find one!

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES;MARTYN GOODACRE/GETTY IMAGES
PATRICK FORD/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

5

PORTISHEAD
THIRD
ISLAND, 2008

Disdainful of "relaxation courses", Portishead embrace folk horror. *By Stephen Troussé*

WHEN Geoff Barrow sparked a minor spat with Mark Ronson in summer 2007, marvelling at the man's ability to "turn decent songs into shit funky supermarket muzak", it wasn't hard to detect a certain reflexive disgust – a feeling only compounded when you delved further into the Portishead MySpace, and found the observation that "music like *Dummy* is being used to sell relaxation courses, and that makes me sick to the guts".

There wasn't much danger of domestication for *Third*. If the first incarnation of Portishead was Lynchian neo-noir, a series of haunted dancehalls and guttering torch songs, now they've evolved into a kind of sci-fi horror. If *Third* were a movie it would be something like *Children Of Men*: an all-too-plausible world of everyday fear, random brutality, burnt-out cities and bleakly creepy countryside.

Lead single "Machine Gun" made this new mood most vivid. The brutal beat recalls an earlier Bristol sound: the industrial hip-hop of Mark Stewart's Mafia and Tackhead – and

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 2; US 7
PRODUCED BY: PORTISHEAD
RECORDED AT: PORTISHEAD'S STUDIO IN BRISTOL

Beware the power of three: (l–r) Adrian Utley, Beth Gibbons and Geoff Barrow, April 2008

beyond that, the sci-synth soundtracks of John Carpenter. Barrow also seems to have fallen for the very different grain of the early Fairlight sampler. Yet against this punishing rhythm Beth Gibbons sings the kind of eerily beautiful, desolate song that wouldn't seem out of place on an early Anne Briggs recording. Where once she was a mercurial, shapeshifting frontwoman, slipping in and out of masks of torch-song temptresses, on *Third*, Gibbons mostly sticks to this one voice – beyond pastiche or persona, a bracing clear cold stream of English folk.

"Deep Water", a simple ukulele shanty, sung by a shipwrecked soul and backed by what sounds like a zombie barbershop quartet, is a rare moment of light. More characteristic is "Silence", opening the album with chase-scene urgency before Gibbons strikes her keynote of implacable grief: "*Empty in our hearts/Crying out in silence ... Did you know what I lost?/Did you know what I wanted?*"

Adrian Utley proves to be the key player through much of the record. Where once he was the model of session-man discretion and style, picking out lines as elegant as Morricone, here his playing is frequently awe-inspiring. "Plastic" is one of a couple of songs that could have appeared on the earlier records, but it's capsized by a huge wail of distorted guitar roaring out of the middle of the track.

This howl is tempered by the clunking funk of primitive electronica, a kind of disturbed cousin to Broadcast's radiophonic lullabies. "We Carry On" blatantly borrows from the Silver Apples' "Oscillations", but in place of their machines of loving grace, the Moogs feel martial as Gibbons sings with halting, hunted urgency: "*The pace of time/I can't survive/It's grinding down the view*". It's awesome and faintly terrifying, like one of Emily Dickinson's more kosmische moments.

The opening moments of the record feature a crackling sample of someone speaking Portuguese which translates as advice to "Beware the rule of three". This could have been a witty, self-deprecating disclaimer, warning of typical third album creative bankruptcy. Instead it provides fair warning that *Third* is the most stark and superb Portishead album yet. ●

THREE INFLUENCES ON *THIRD*

SILVER APPLES

A hip name to drop in the period (check *you* out, Damon Albarn), Simeon (electronics) and Dan (drums) were the raw fizz and driving inspiration behind "We Carry On"

OM

The rhythm section of stoner rockers Sleep. Minimal grooves, maximum heaviosity. There might be something in it

SUNN O)))

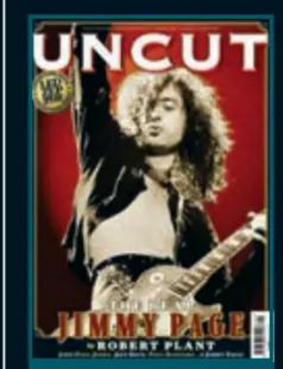
Booked for the Portishead ATP, the drone metallers offered a lesson in locating and committing to a scarifying vision

Sunn O)))

ROBERT LACHMAN/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA GETTY IMAGES; GETTY IMAGES

"We're like a weird dysfunctional family"

After 10 years away, PORTISHEAD are back from the brink with 2008's best album. *Uncut* meets GEOFF BARROW and ADRIAN UTLEY, who are still reeling from freezing holiday camps and meeting Chuck D. "We're not cold emotionally," Geoff Barrow tells Stephen Troussé. "We create this... thing, which is Portishead."



YOU might begin the story of 2008's best album back in 1998, at the moment when Beth Gibbons, Geoff Barrow and Adrian Utley came off stage at a festival in Lelystad in Holland, the final date in a year-long tour, and decided they needed to take a very long break. Or you could begin at the moment when Barrow realised that his band's music now seemed to feature heavily in adverts for relaxation therapy. Alternatively you could begin a couple of years ago, on the afternoon when Adrian and Geoff first chanced upon the chord sequence of "Magic Doors", and felt they'd finally found the combination to their future.

But something in the mood of the record makes it only appropriate that the story begins at a dismal, dilapidated holiday camp on the Somerset coast in December 2007. Portishead chose to debut *Third* at ATP's Nightmare Before Christmas, a festival they programmed themselves, at Butlin's in Minehead. The bill included cosmic metallers Sunn O))), electronic pioneers the Silver Apples, Balkan folksters A Hawk And A Hacksaw and avant-garde guitar composer Glenn Branca.

"Thinking back on it, it was pretty mad," admits Utley. "Not only were we performing for the first time in so long, we were organising a festival! But it did feel like presenting our aesthetic universe. What's so great about ATP is that you get to open up the lid on someone's head and see exactly what's going on in their world."

EVA VERMANDEL

Portishead in 2008: (l–r) Beth Gibbons, Geoff Barrow and Adrian Utley – "We still have a future"

Masking in it, 2008: "Portishead really is something separate from the three of us"

"I remember getting a call from Glenn Branca – and he's in Minehead in a holiday camp. And I can hear the wind in the phone and this voice saying, 'It's fucking cold, man!' I'm thinking, 'God, It's really happening!' It was pretty weird. The swimming pool was insane – full of big guys with beards and tattoos, shooting down the slides."

It was a brilliantly uncompromising lineup (so much so that the combination of drone metal and bleak midwinter Butlin's caused some representatives of the press to flee after a single night), and one that began to make more sense with the album's release in April.

In a sense Portishead had been trapped by their own brilliance. Their debut album was so radical and yet so fully achieved, so assured in its suture of blunted beats, crackling noir strings and blasted torch song, that it seemed to harden into cliché in record time. With *Third*, the group's achievement was to allow the music to evolve, grow into something new, rich and strange without sacrificing their basic equation. The grainy martial drum beat and desolate melody of the stunning lead single "Machine Gun" was thrillingly abrasive, but somehow unmistakably Portishead. lt seemed like a folk song from a Britain broken so much more intimately and profoundly than anyone had guessed. It's hard to think of a more successful recent comeback.

"At ATP we were playing in front of quite hardcore fans from Europe who had travelled to see us," remembers Barrow. "But right at the back were people who had come to see other bands, and were going to check us out, but didn't really like us. And what's weird is that they responded better to the new material more than anything else. People weren't talking about stuff off *Dummy* – they were actually talking about the new tunes. It was a great reaction to have because that was our concern, that people might say, 'Nice album, but l loved it when you played "Glory Box".'"

> "I feel incredibly satisfied about what we've achieved"
>
> GEOFF BARROW

This time round, the touring was kept to a minimum – a few civilised dates around the UK and Europe, before a couple of festival appearances at Coachella in California and Primavera in Spain. Barrow and Utley maintain that they didn't want to exhaust themselves as they'd done in the past, jeopardising the future of the group, but there are hints of "personal reasons" that prevented the group from touring beyond May, missing out on the lucrative summer festival season.

"I never liked playing live," says Barrow, "but I found it fairly enjoyable this year. It wasn't that much of a stressful situation. You can get frightened of it becoming something else. lt's not as controllable sonically."

But you sense jazz veteran Utley relishes the chance to take the songs on the road. "It was just a couple of months, really – starting off in a bunker in Berlin as you might expect – and ending with palm trees and sand, which was quite surreal! I would have been up for more shows, certainly. But this way at least we still have a future.But always playing live, the music grows. 'Threads' has flowered into something else, I get a different relationship, the music has a different feeling. I can sometimes better what's happening. There's a point, playing live, when it gets better and finds itself somehow."

The tour came to a memorable climax at Primavera in Barcelona, where the band were joined onstage by long-time hero and inspiration, Chuck D from Public Enemy.

"Geoff had the idea, and I was like, 'Fucking hell, that would be brilliant!"' says Utley, still amazed it happened.

"They were on tour playing *It Takes A Nation of Millions To Hold Us Back* – and that's the record that changed mine and Geoff's lives, the one we talked about when we first met up."

"Public Enemy were my punk," continues Barrow. "It was just the way the sounds worked – the political message, the whole thing. It

Long-time hero Chuck D, 2008

THEO WARGO/WIREIMAGE

just blew my brains out! So we were just shitting ourselves. We met Chuck and it was really weird. I was really nervous... Ade [Utley] said he turned into some kind of upper-class twit, burbling on like, 'It's terribly nice to meet you.' And I turned into this bumbling Barnstaple gardener going, 'Yer fucken amaaayzen!'

We didn't know he was really going to do it until he came on stage. He said, 'Well you do your stuff and I might come and join you.' But we didn't know until he was standing at the side of the stage with his lyrics. He's a hero: he's stayed true and remained serious about his musical and political intentions and everything else..."

Despite the brevity of the tour and absence of airplay for singles, the impact of *Third* seems to have been profound, not least among musicians. In June, Radiohead uploaded a video of their acoustic cover of *Third*'s loveliest track, "The Rip".

"That was amazing", says Utley. "It did feel like the '60s when people use to cover each other's songs – like Hendrix doing Cream's 'Sunshine Of Your Love' during 'Hey Joe'."

Long-time friend and associate Will Gregory from Goldfrapp plays skronky sax on "Magic Doors" and flugelhorn that seems to herald the approach of a Viking death ship on the closing "Threads", and is full of admiration for their achievement. "I just think hats off to them, really: for not being tempted to make a lot of albums in the meantime, in taking the time to get it right."

Having returned so convincingly this year, surely confidence within the band is sky-high? But suggest this, and that old diffidence returns. "Do we feel closer or stronger as a band?" wonders Barrow. "I have no idea! Did Beth enjoy it? I don't know! Did Ade enjoy it? God, It's weird but we really don't talk about enjoying it! In some ways, we're like a weird dysfunctional family. I mean, we're not cold emotionally.

"We create this... thing, which is Portishead... But the thing is, we're none of us, individually, Portishead. It really is something separate from the three of us. We put it out there, but I don't think it affects us personally."

Touchingly, both Barrow and Utley seem baffled by the absence of Beth Gibbons for our interview.

Concern that the lyrics to *Third* suggest a soul sick with terror, panic and confusion is knocked back calmly. "She's a grown woman," says Utley. "She knows what she's doing."

"It's strange to know what she's into, really," says Utley with genial exasperation. "She has this way of being in music that's sort of... vague. We would very rarely have a conversation like Geoff and I have. She doesn't talk in the way musos talk. She won't use categories in that way. She understands them, but it's beyond that. She won't say 'dubstep', she'll say something like ... 'dancey beat'!"

But when they got off stage after Primavera, when there was a stage invasion by ecstatic fans, didn't they feel it was mission accomplished?

"I feel incredibly satisfied about what we've achieved," smiles Barrow. "But every time I think of this year, writing, recording, playing live, I just think of Beth saying: 'Yeah, it's all right...' And I think that's the way we all feel about it." ●

"There's a lot of self-doubt in Portishead..."

GEOFF BARROW on the background to the long-awaited new Portishead album. "We were running on empty," he tells John Robinson. "We had to rebuild our personal lives..."

It's been 10 years since your last LP...

GEOFF BARROW: We finished the last tour [in 1998] fairly broken people. We're not made for the excesses of the rock'n roll lifestyle. At that time The Verve had just split up, so we were headlining all the European festivals. We were a studio band with fairly strange sound issues playing to 55,000 people. It all went down incredibly well. But there was loads of personal stuff going on behind the scenes, which was just horrible. We had all kinds of divorces and illnesses... Personally I quit music for about four years.

Hence the long break. But what it came down to is that there's never any point in releasing a record if you've got nothing to say, and at that point we were running on empty. We had to go out and live a little bit, rebuild our personal lives and get the drive to think we were doing something forward-thinking. Adrian and Beth went off and did other things: Beth made her own record, of course, and Adrian did some soundtrack stuff. I escaped. I ran to Australia. In 2001 Adrian and I went to record some Portishead material in Sydney in a mate's studio for seven weeks – but it just didn't feel right. It didn't feel like we were breaking any new ground.

So when did things start coming together for the new album? Not until 2003, when I wrote "Magic Doors". I wrote it, Beth sang on it, and it was the first time we thought, 'Oh, this is actually all right', you know what I mean? Basically, we have a policy which is one step forward, eight steps back. We've never felt any pressure from outside, it's all internal – there's a lot of self-doubt in Portishead. In 2006 we had a meeting with our record company, because our A&R guy went to run Virgin so we thought, 'We'd better go and meet whoever was left. So we went to meet the MD,and we played him seven tracks. We went back a year later and we had six tracks, because we'd dropped one and were just about to drop another three. If we didn't have to work this way, we wouldn't, believe me.

Where have the new ones come from? Once we get on a roll, it's OK– we wrote five or six tracks in six months. What happens is, we write an idea, say a guitar and vocal, and that could sit on the shelf for three years. It gets pulled down every now and then, and I'll have a tinker with it, and then get really depressed because I can't come up with anything, a formula. We have this saying, "It's all right to have a song. But where does it actually live?" Like, in what atmosphere does it live in?

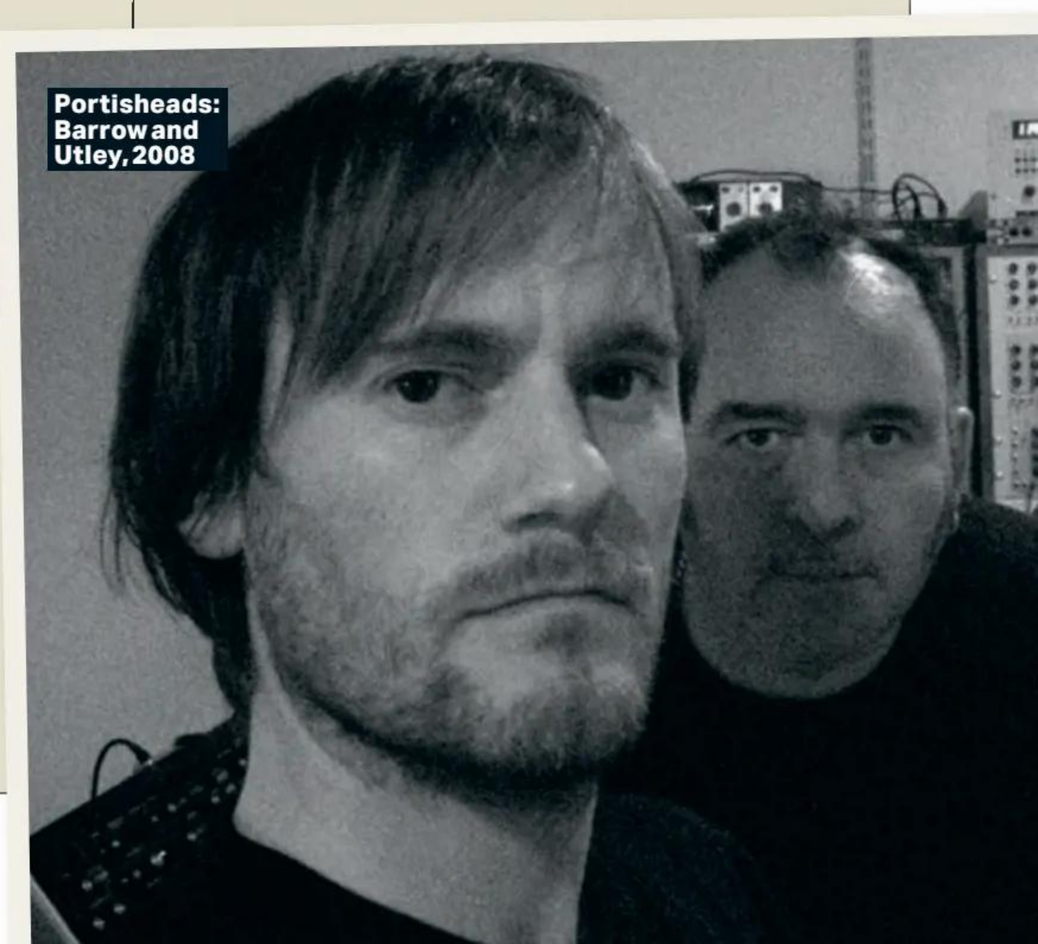
There are a lot of pretty heavy jams on this album. Some krautrocky moments, The Silver Apples... They're not jams, though... there's no happy mistakes. I'd love to be the sort of band that goes in, jams the hell out of something and then just chops it up, like Can. But we're just two people. It's me and Ade staring at each other, going, "Well, who's going to be Damo?" I run a label in Bristol now [Invada], and I've been exposed to quite a lot of heavy music over the past few years, like Om. Maybe it's not apparent that we're into that kind of stuff on the record, but about two or three years ago I had an experience. I'd been in the music industry since I was 19, but I went to an Om gig, and it was like seeing Public Enemy when I was a teenager. It was that uncompromising kind of sound.

Tell me a bit more about the roles In the group. When does Beth Gibbons come into the process? It's changed a little bit over the years, because these days Beth will come in with a whole song or a guitar riff. Obviously we've worked with Beth for years, so it just sounds like Beth, but with this album it sounds like a frustration with society has crept into things this time, rather than personal frustration. The main thing for us was to not repeat ourselves, but still maintain the emotional element to what we do.

Your sound has changed quite a lot The whole kind of writing a big string thing, and playing a Rhodes piano is just so obvious... If you want that, then listen to the early albums. I'm not saying that there isn't a sense of beauty on this record, because hopefully there is – but maybe you've got to work a little harder to hear it.

Your first LP made a huge impact – how do you feel about it now? I'm glad people dug it, and it's allowed us to be free of a lot of pressure because we sold enough of them to be kind of slightly more progressive, maybe. It's allowed us a lot of artistic freedom. It's all very positive – how it was absorbed into the mainstream was very peculiar. The idea of people having dinner parties with it, meant that the mood of the record was overlooked a bit, really. Because that wasn't really very nice. It was absorbed – but I'm not going to be a music police and tell people how they should listen to it.

Can you see them having dinner parties to this one? No, I doubt it, but it's not a reaction to that, it's just where we are. At the time, some people took *Dummy* back to Woolworths as it had scratches on it – everyone thought that was odd when they first heard it. Hopefully this will be the same.


Portisheads: Barrow and Utley, 2008

4

RADIOHEAD
KID A
PARLOPHONE/CAPITOL, 2000

Everything in the wrong place! Radiohead shake up their own landscape. *By Peter Watts*

RADIOHEAD had never wanted to repeat themselves, but it was at least possible to draw a straight line of progression from *Pablo Honey* through *The Bends* to *OK Computer*. But then came *Kid A*, a record that would cast as epic a shadow over the 2000s as *OK Computer* had dominated the end of the 1990s even though it sounded like it belonged on the timelines of another band entirely. Just about the only thing that tied *Kid A* to the band's preceding catalogue was Thom Yorke's voice and a general demeanour of sad ennui. Samples and loops replaced guitars; rhythm and texture replaced melody. Electronica, modern classical musical and jazz provide the model. There's nothing in the line of stadium-filling indie-mope anthems or Top 10 singles – indeed, no singles were even released.

Countless bands have tried to shake off the shackles of fame by taking an unexpected swerve in an unpopular direction, but few have done so as emphatically and convincingly. It helped that the music was so damn good, of course. Initial reviews carped at the

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 1
PRODUCED BY: NIGEL GODRICH, RADIOHEAD
RECORDED AT: GUILLAUME TELL, PARIS; MEDLEY, COPENHAGEN; RADIOHEAD STUDIO, OXFORDSHIRE

Radiohead at the Shoreline Amphitheatre in Mountain View, CA, during the Amnesiac Tour, June 27, 2001

band copying ideas from the Warp back catalogue much as people had sneered at Blur for discovering Pavement, but in both cases the bands were open about their influences and original in how they used them.

Yorke's writing process had begun with "Everything In Its Right Place", originally composed on piano but then transferred to synth with heavily treated vocals. It is repetitive, flatter and less dynamic than Radiohead's usual fare, setting a tone that's maintained through the discordant krautrock of "The National Anthem", the ambient drone of "Treefingers" and the beautiful organ-led "Motion Picture Soundtrack" right up to the concluding track, the gorgeous fragment "Untitled". One of the best tracks is "How To Disappear Completely", with Yorke's desperate, repetitive vocal drifting over strings (composed by Johnny Greenwood), keyboards and loops, taking the atmosphere of Warp but wedding it to something more indefinably accessible. "Idioteque" attempts to throw the listener with spitting drums and drone, but a plaintive vocal and Greenwood's guitar offer grounding. The title track has unnervingly treated vocals, but the warm synth gives the listener a lifebelt amid the alienation. Right in the middle of weirdness, "Optimistic" offers a return to more traditional rock dynamics. Radiohead write about disconnection but can't help doing so in a way that connects.

Kid A almost broke Radiohead. Yorke's determination to make a clean break from rock music left the rest of the band wondering precisely what their role would be, but by the end of the sessions they had enough songs left over for *Amnesiac*. So *Kid A* made Radiohead. Its success meant that nobody has ever expected Radiohead to return to the formula of *OK Computer*, while confirming them as arguably the bravest and most original band of the era. It gave all five band members the freedom and security to experiment with different genres inside and outside Radiohead, showing that radical shifts in direction can be tolerated and accepted if they are done with sufficient authenticity, confidence and panache. Radiohead followed through on their conviction and changed the rules for everybody. ●

THREE OTHER *KID A*s

DAVID BOWIE
LOW (RCA, 1977)
Introspection. A side of electronics instrumentals. We all know it's his best album, but it didn't sell terribly well

NIRVANA
IN UTERO (DGC, 1993)
A brutal Steve Albini production of savage and unsparing songs. That's one way to shake off the pressures of an unwanted fanbase

PINK FLOYD
HOUSEHOLD OBJECTS
(UNRELEASED, 1974)
After the success of *Dark Side Of The Moon*? How about music with no instruments! Fun idea, but yielded very few tunes

JOHN SHEARER/WIREIMAGE;GETTY IMAGES

3

THE STROKES
IS THIS IT

ROUGH TRADE, 2001

Julian Casablancas gifts a misleadingly simple vision to the world. *By John Robinson*

THE world – particularly music critic world – was both right and very wrong about The Strokes. There was no mistaking the quality of the music, which surged onward with complete self-assurance, like the great debut albums of the past, most recently *Definitely Maybe*. Nor the assured greatness of the package – five good-looking lads playing guitars – which could only help with the certainty of this surefire hit.

Nonetheless, in our haste to photograph the band smoking cigarettes and leaning against walls in moody black and white, or describe their exploits, and paint them into the corner where we keep our world-changing rock bands, a point was missed. Contributions were made by others, but this wasn't a band in the old way, but a new one: a vehicle for the compositions of Julian Casablancas, whose misleadingly sleepy lyricism and meticulous attention to detail assembled the vision from which The Strokes were built.

Rough Trade employees of the time smirk somewhat at the notion that the band were

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 2; US 33

PRODUCED BY: GORDON RAPHAEL

RECORDED AT: TRANSPORTERRAUM, NYC

Welcome to their world: The Strokes backstage at The Fillmore, SF, October 2001 – (l–r) Fabrizio Moretti, Albert Hammond Jr, Nick Valensi, Julian Casablancas and Nikolai Fraiture

signed after Geoff Travis played their demo tape while driving home – because this was a record on which nothing was really left to chance. As much as this enormously exciting and accomplished 35 minutes sounds like a fortuitously taped rehearsal, what we hear has been worked and reworked – sessions with Pixies producer Gil Norton were rejected before "band mentor" Gordon Raphael was given the production chair. Whether it's your alluring backstory, promo photo, or debut album, you never get a second chance to make a first impression.

The efforts they made continue to reap rewards. The band's "The Modern Age" EP and diligent touring of influential UK markets – and pre-YouTube CD swapping – meant that there was only maybe a few songs that were unknown to listeners already pre-loaded with love for the album, but more familiar songs ("The Modern Age", "Barely Legal" and "Last Night") all played their part in a supremely dynamic album. Attention to detail was as key here as an R&B album of the period: "accidental" studio acoustics, a guitar intro, possibly second, layered melodies and gear changes, bass drops – and that was just "Soma", possibly not the first song people remember.

This variety and dynamic is built into the album's bigger picture, where the more immediately classic songs like the Tom Jonesy "Last Night" or "Hard To Explain" are interspersed with minor-key dynamic marvels like "Alone Together" or the title track. As with the lyrics, where stories are broken off mid telling, or grown out from not much more than a few attractive phrases, the LP keeps you in the thick of it in the band's world: on the street, in the apartment, in the club or in the argument, only letting you see what it wants you to. The twists and turns surprising you every time. Twenty years on, it retains that magic. ●

Yeah Yeah Yeahs

THREE DECENT STROKES CONTEMPORARIES

YEAH YEAH YEAHS

Raucous garage-pop trio acting as the bright, trash-fashion foil to The Strokes' ramshackle Rat Pack

THE WALKMEN

Featuring three-fifths of NYC scene forerunners Jonathan Fire*Eater, The Walkmen provided a more frantic take on The Strokes' suave new wave

KINGS OF LEON

Or "The Southern Strokes", given how the garage urgency and pace of debut album *Youth & Young Manhood* echoed the new East Village thrill

ANTHONY PIDGEON/REDFERNS; GETTY IMAGES

2

RADIOHEAD
IN RAINBOWS

SELF-RELEASED/XL, 2007

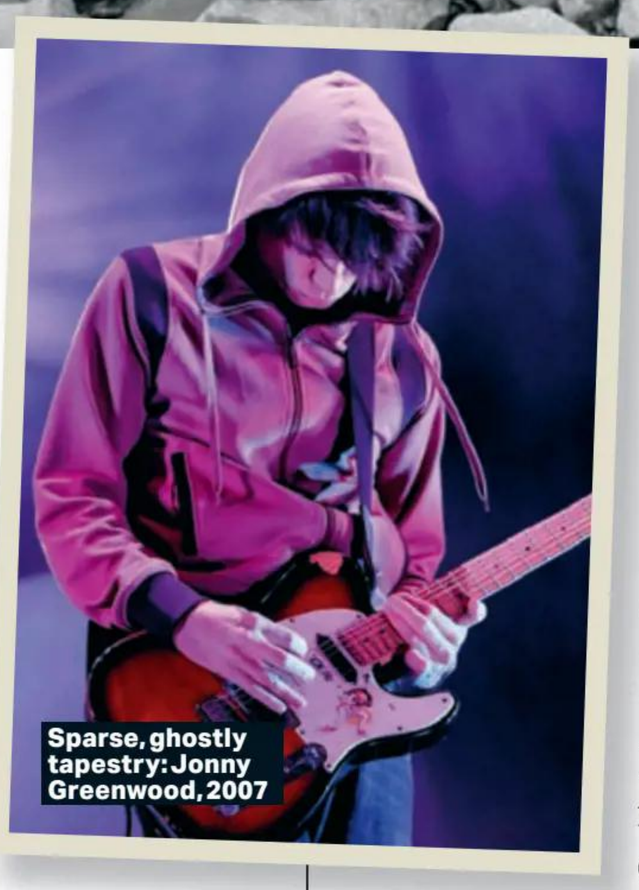
Remade, remodelled. The world's best unsigned band do their stuff. *By Mark Beaumont*

HAVING spent their 21st century thus far exploring what mainstream alternative music could be, Radiohead turned to the pressing matter of how. Their EMI contract having ended with 2003's *Hail To The Thief*, they were – as the *New York Times* put it – "by far the world's most popular unsigned band". And with online leaks and piracy rife, yet still in their technological infancy, they took the opportunity to road-test a new post-millennial release model. With music increasingly free, they set at their feet a virtual tip jar, releasing their seventh album *In Rainbows* online themselves and asking in recompense only what the listener thought it was worth.

It proved a controversial plan. All well and good for a multi-million-selling, established band like Radiohead (and with a 3 million-selling physical release on XL to follow, actually quite a money-spinner); not so great a precedent to set as smaller artists' record sales income collapsed around them. But even fans with the deepest pockets didn't feel

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 1; US 1
PRODUCED BY: NIGEL GODRICH
RECORDED AT: HALSWELL HOUSE, SOMERSET; TOTTENHAM HOUSE, WILTSHIRE; THE HOSPITAL CLUB, LONDON; RADIOHEAD'S STUDIO, OXFORDSHIRE

All at sea: Thom Yorke gets closer to nature, 2007



Sparse, ghostly tapestry: Jonny Greenwood, 2007

short-changed. Thom Yorke considered *In Rainbows* "our classic album, our *Transformer*, our *Revolver*, our *Hunky Dory*" and critics have since elevated it to the position of a post-millennial companion piece to *OK Computer*.

These rainbows were dark of hue and deeply internalised. Eschewing the politics and anger of *Hail To The Thief*, Yorke turned calmly inward, confronting mortality, disillusion, fear, transience and spiritual alienation: "Bodysnatchers", a motorik groove-off between Wolfmother and Neu! recorded in a period of "hyperactive mania", was inspired by *The Stepford Wives*, Victorian ghost stories and Yorke's similar sense of existential entrapment. Meanwhile, the band and regular producer Nigel Godrich steered their experimental journeying into dense but warmly welcoming waters. "15 Step" may have been built on a crackling quintuple meter rhythm inspired by Peaches' "Fuck The Pain Away" but Jonny Greenwood's guitar draped it in a sparse, ghostly tapestry that softened the album's spiked edges throughout. "Nude" was an *OK Computer* leftover transformed into a ghost dimension orchestral waltz. "All I Need" is a pulse of deep-space ennui, its white noise effects constructed from the organic source of a string section playing every note of the scale.

Where earlier albums had sometimes resembled a clashing clamour of modernist ideas, here Greenwood's unforced textures combined with jittery polyrhythms to create a tenderly cohesive tone for *In Rainbows*. "Weird Fishes/ Arpeggi", "Faust Arp" and "Jigsaw Falling Into Place" all conjured an itchy, tumbling intimacy that would become common alt-rock parlance over the coming decade for the likes of Foals, The Maccabees, Bon Iver, Grizzly Bear and US indie folk in general. It even infected the reggae lilt of "House Of Cards" and the distant gospel party vibe of "Reckoner". And for its cohesion, *In Rainbows* would come to be accepted as the definitive album of Radiohead's experimental period just as *OK Computer* had epitomised their rock age. Worth a copper or two in the hat. ●

THREE EARLY VERSIONS AS DEBUTED SOLO BY THOM YORKE

VIDEOTAPE

At a 2005 solo piano performance for Nigel Godrich's *From The Basement* series, Thom Yorke debuted several early versions of *In Rainbows*-era songs, including this haunting take on the album closer

DOWN IS THE NEW UP

An austere piece riding on a hidden groove when premiered on piano. Was fully recorded with a crackling retro beat during album sessions and ended up on the B-side to "Nude"

LAST FLOWERS

Yorke, on surface reading, is driven to drink by Alexa and digital kettles on this maudlin ode to technological overwhelm

Blond ambition: Yorke in *From The Basement*, 2005

LEON NEAL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

1

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM
SOUND OF SILVER

RELEASED: MARCH 12, 2007

The New York art rockers' second album achieved a rare alchemy, connecting the dots between rock and dance. The result? A 21st-century masterpiece. *By Paul Moody*

BY 2007, the once vibrant New York music scene of the early 2000s was, well, losing its edge. The rigours of mainstream success had robbed The Strokes, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Interpol of their civic sparkle, while a swathe of copycat acts from around the globe had reduced the dance-punk blueprint laid down on The Rapture's (DFA-produced) "House Of Jealous Lovers" to the point where independent music had lost the capacity to thrill and inspire. "There's too much music," said James Murphy at the time. "Major labels are pretty terrible at what they do; radio is absolutely shit. Production is terrible, people are terrible at making records – they sound awful."

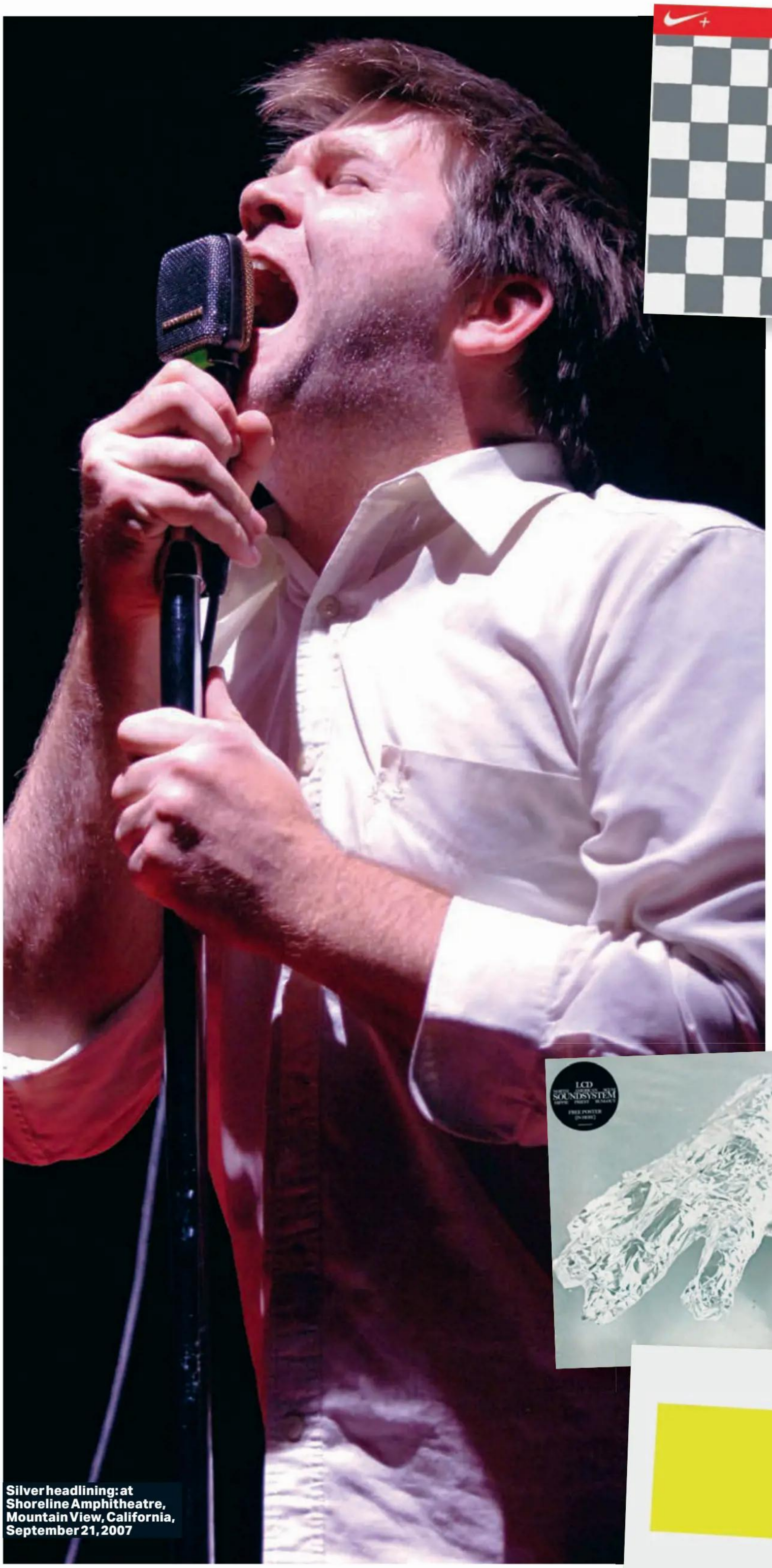
His response would be an album which would reignite the passions of a generation of music fans – and re-establish New York as the glittering epicentre of global cool. Unapologetically high-brow – the album was dedicated to Bulgarian-born psychiatrist Dr George Kamen, considered a pioneer in group therapy – and inculcated with a crate-digger's sensibility (there are nods to outsider icons ranging from Brian Eno to The Fall to Steve Reich), *Sound Of Silver*'s 56-minute, nine-song duration was also rhythmically radical, Murphy's DIY approach seeing him trade slick digital beats for a jittery cacophony of sputtering electronics and disco handclaps. All delivered with an analogue warmth more reminiscent of '70s rock than modern dance.

Lyrically, too, *Sound Of Silver* stripped away decades of artifice, Murphy drilling into the nature of loss in a series of deeply personal vignettes which traded the traditional rock lexicon for brutal honesty. At the album's thematic core is the loss of youth, the then 36-year-old articulating hipster paranoia directly in the title track: "*Sound of silver talk to me/Makes you want to feel like a teenager/Until you remember the feelings of/A real-life emotional teenager/Then you think again*".

The process which led to this sonic breakthrough began in 2006, when – as with 2005's eponymous first album *LCD Soundsystem* – Murphy headed to the rural isolation of Long View Farm, a Massachusetts dairy estate with an illustrious history, having played host to everyone from Stevie Wonder to Bad Brains (it was also where Keith Richards famously recorded the 1981 'Lost Sessions').

Determined not to repeat the production mistakes of his debut – which he'd dubbed "a little beige" – Murphy covered the walls with tin foil and silver fabric, as a constant reminder of sonic touchstones including DAF, T.Rex, Heaven 17 and, most specifically, Hawkwind's "Silver Machine". However, wracked by personal demons and struck down with an acute case of writer's block, the new material felt "like a parody of the first ➢

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: UK 28; US 46
PRODUCED BY: THE DFA
RECORDED AT: LONG VIEW FARM, NORTH BROOKFIELD, MA; DFA, NEW YORK CITY



Silver headlining: at Shoreline Amphitheatre, Mountain View, California, September 21, 2007

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

record [with] some embarrassing attempts at reinvention". The creative shackles were only loosened when a commission from Nike to produce a soundtrack for their 'Original Run' series (the one-track *45:33* album) allowed him to think more freely. What followed was an outpouring of emotion delivered with a monomaniacal intensity. Working alone, Murphy would ask DFA associates Pat Mahoney, Tyler Pope and Nancy Whang to sketch out their parts remotely – before re-recording them himself. "I don't have to sit there and pretend it's a democracy and really be trying to control everything," he told *The Village Voice* of his working practices. "I feel like bands' ideas become mushy. They get too democratic; they get watered down."

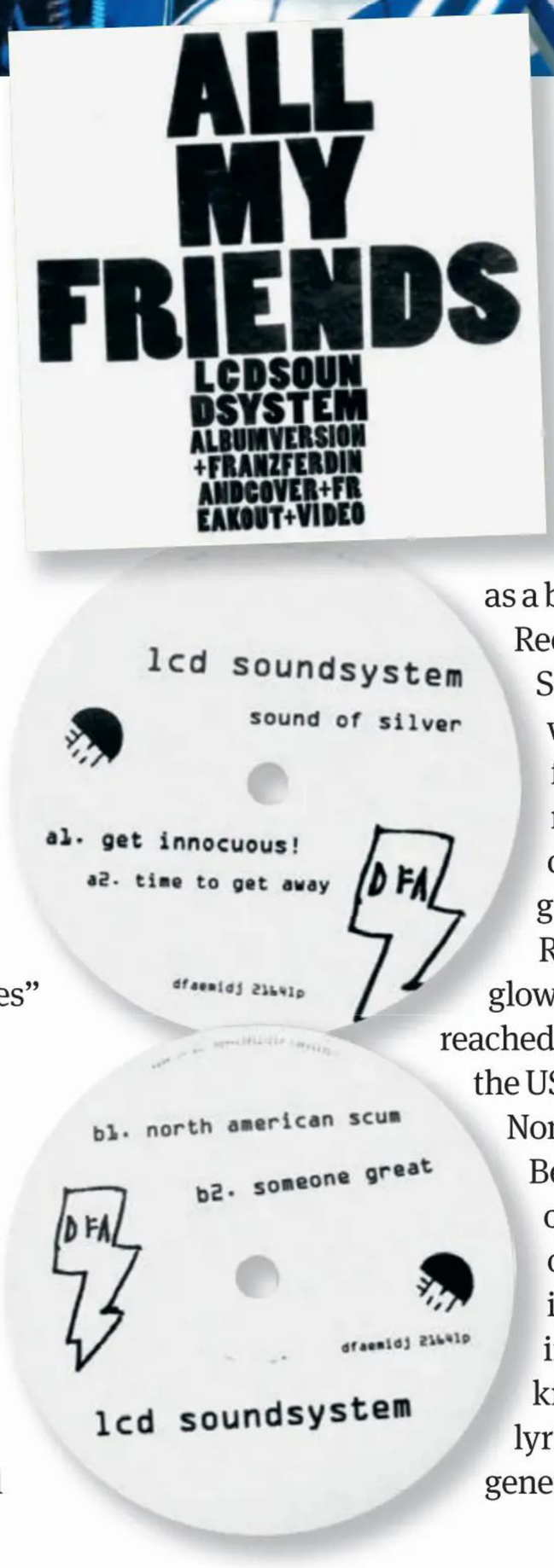
Spellbinding opener "Get Innocuous!" sets the tone. Opening with a Casio beat mimicking debut single "Losing My Edge", it builds into a hypnotic rhythm as Murphy – in a jaded vocal worthy of *Dare*-era Phil Oakey – details a disillusioned DJ observing the glitterball-lit throng: *"When once you had believed it/Now you see it's sucking you in"*. Of course, no-one understands dancefloor dynamics better than Murphy, illustrated by "Time To Get Away"'s irresistible cowbell-heavy groove, before there's a dramatic gear-shift for "North American Scum". A blazing repudiation of America's global reputation in the Bush era, the song's withering lyric (*"And for those of you who still think we're from England/We're not, no"*) is set to a Suicide-esque wall of fuzz guitars.

A twinkling "Someone Great" is even more powerful, the death of a loved one juxtaposed with everyday banalities (*"The worst is all the lovely weather/I'm stunned it's not raining"*) — all delivered over bleeping synths

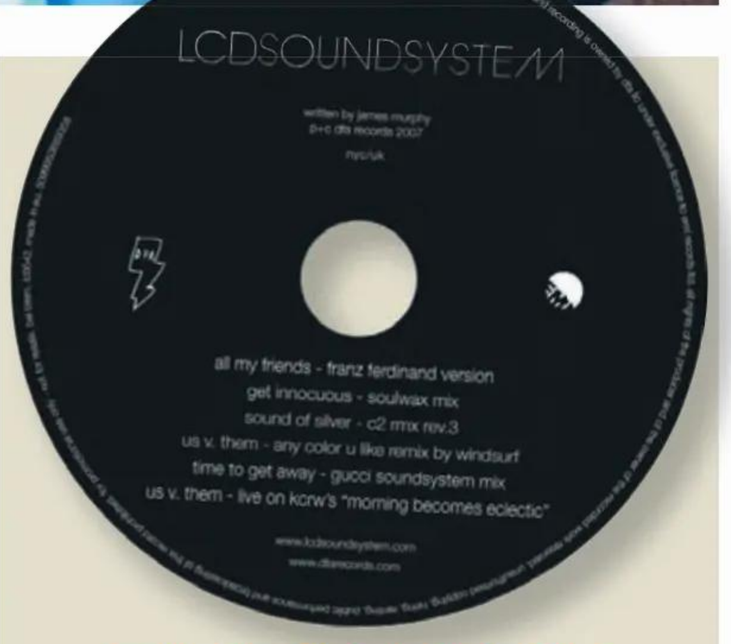
Systems go: James Murphy (centre) is joined by Nancy Whang and Pat Mahoney for LCD Soundsystem's set at Coachella festival, April 28, 2007

reminiscent of life-support machines. Inspired by the repetitive rhythm of Joy Division's "Transmission", "All My Friends" is more poignant still, a rolling piano riff the backdrop for Murphy's pin-sharp musings on the price of success ("*You spend the first five years trying to get with the pain/And the next five years trying to be with your friends again*").

If white-knuckle stomp "Watch The Tapes" has the feel of Murphy blowing off steam, the pulsating, eight-plus-minute "Us V Them" provides the album with its sonic centrepiece – a riot of skittering beats, funky cowbells and chanted vocals. However, its emotional heart lies in a final "New York, I Love You But You're Bringing Me Down". A five-and-a-half-minute, beat-free epic lamenting the city's gentrification under Mayor Giuliani ("*Your mild billionaire mayor's now convinced he's a king*") presented as a ballad which nods to Lou Reed's 'Walk On The Wild Side', it provides the album with a perfect showbiz finale – its societal ache mirroring the album's central themes of loss and grudging acceptance.



Released in March 2007 to glowing reviews, *Sound Of Silver* reached No 28 in the UK and grazed the US Top 40 (reaching No 46). Nominated for the Grammy for Best Electronic/Dance album on release, its reputation has only grown over the years, its deeply personal mix of indie attitude, dancefloor know-how and sardonic lyrics a go-to for successive generations of music fans. ●



THE THREE BEST TRACKS ON THE "BUNCH OF STUFF" EP

"ALL MY FRIENDS" (FRANZ FERDINAND VERSION)

Of all the tracks on James Murphy's iTunes-only follow-up EP to *Sound Of Silver*, this stood out for being a reworked cover by Franz Ferdinand that matches, in dance-rock form, the original's rising intensity

"GET INNOCUOUS!" (SOULWAX REMIX)

Soulwax referenced Kraftwerk and forefronted Murphy's beloved '70s analogue synths and drum machines on their jittery 10-minute remix

"US V THEM" (LIVE)

The time had come for punk-funk breakfast as the live LCD unload in frenzied party form for KCRW's *Morning Becomes Eclectic* show

TIMMOSENFELDER/GETTYIMAGES

"Britney was very professional. Then she went to lunch and never came back"

On the return of LCD SOUNDSYSTEM in 2018, *Uncut* seeks an audience with the excellent JAMES MURPHY. Revealed: what advice he received from David Bowie, and an entertaining story about tape bias voltage. "All of my friends are all tied up inside like punk rock Woody Allens," hears Michael Bonner

JAMES Murphy is giving *Uncut* a tour of his dressing room in Atlanta, Georgia, via a video conferencing call. "Here's a wardrobe," he says, waving his iPad in the direction of a large trunk. "People sometimes like different sneakers to play in, like show shoes. Then there's a bunch of food back there, and there's a little couch. Oh, and some wine."

Murphy's band, LCD Soundsystem, have just begun the US leg of their tour supporting *American Dream* – *Uncut*'s Album Of The Year that is also the band's first new material since their reunion. It has, admits Murphy, been an unexpectedly protracted comeback. "This hasn't gone to plan, not at all," he admits. "I was supposed to be done with the record before we played Coachella in 2016. I was slower making the record than I wanted. But I'm happy. We tour well. As you saw, there's lots of wine, and there's a guy down the hall who makes espresso. The band like being with each other, the crew has been with us since the olden days. But it's tough – four of us have kids."

And with that, Murphy piles into your questions – on a range of subjects ranging from real-estate tips to soft play recommendations and working with Britney Spears. "I'm happy right now," he says chewing on a handful of peanuts. "I'm super lucky."

What makes a good comeback? And a bad one, come to that?
Colin Yorke, Reading

Being good at it. Being a shadow of your former self with less expensive gear, and not really being into it, I think makes a bad comeback. For me, I wouldn't come back unless I knew we were better. I realise I might not write another "Losing My Edge" or "All My Friends", songs that captured some sort of zeitgeist and therefore have a place in the culture. But I'm not Lou Reed, I'm not going to get a headless Steinberger and do a Honda scooter ad. I think Lou Reed was quite fearless: "I don't give a shit. I didn't give a shit then, I don't give a shit now, I just think 'work'." He almost wilfully ignored the zeitgeistness of some of his songs.

I just watched a Yes documentary, and though I love Yes, there comes a time when you have to think, "Dude, to thine own self be true." You've got to know what is not a good record and what is a good record.

MICHEL LINSSEN/REDFERNS

"I'm not Lou Reed": Murphy in 2009

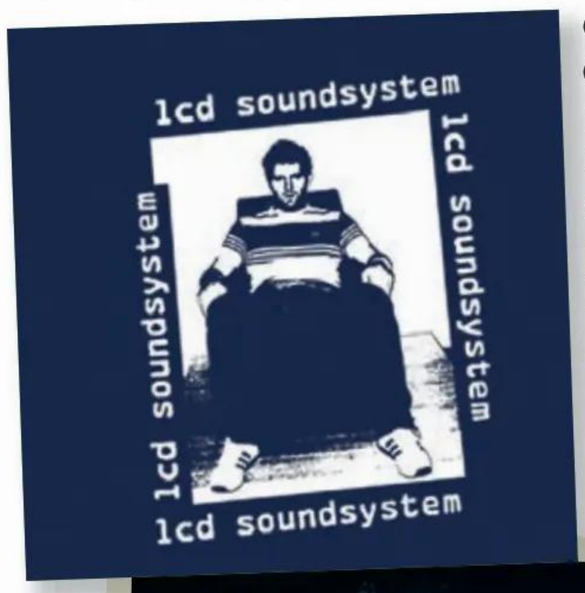
Beats here now: Murphy with LDC at the Berlin Tempodrom, May 30, 2018

Do you mind people still banging on about "Losing My Edge"?
Jon McCrea, Dublin

No, I'm super proud of it. There's great footage of Pulp playing Glastonbury and Jarvis says, "The next song we're going to play might be the only song we're remembered for – but I don't care, because it's a fucking good song." And they play "Common People". I feel that way too. I saw some interviews with John Lydon where he's complaining about how he's been in PiL for 30 years but people just bang on about the Pistols. I love PiL, I think PiL are a superior band, but you can't complain about how important your teenage punk band was. If people really care – until they die – about your ramblings as a 19-year-old, that's a lucky break, because most people don't fucking care about anything anybody does.

What's the best piece of advice David Bowie gave you?
Emma Berry, Southampton

"You should get a Supro Dual Tone, it's what Link Wray played." He had two Supro Dual Tone guitars and he was very proud of them. He had an amazing ability to be childishly excited by things. When we were doing "Blackstar", he'd played sax on the demo. We're working with Donny McCaslin, who is arguably one of the best young living sax players, and David said, "Are we leaving my sax in?" Tony Visconti said, "Yeah, totally." And David was like, "I played sax on a record with Donny McCaslin!" It was very genuine. But, yes, he was very excited by the Dual Tones. So I bought one and played it on "Emotional Haircut" on the new album and love it. So I took his advice and bought two 1950s Link Wray-style Dual Tones.



A "childishly excited" David Bowie playing his Supro Dual Tone guitar

What's the rarest/coolest record you own?
Luke Spencer, London

My '80s darkwave tapes. I put out a goth album in 1987. I have cassettes, four-track stuff, from before we went into the studio that I vastly preferred at the time to the finished album. I found the tapes in a storage locker I didn't know I had. I tried to cancel a credit card and the company said, "What do you want us to do with the monthly bill for the storage facility?" I had a locker that I'd stored stuff in during the '90s and then forgot about. There was an $8 IKEA table in there, my ex-girlfriend-from-high-school's painting, my childhood Dungeons & Dragons manual and two shoeboxes full of cassettes. They date from 1983–87. I also have some amazing photos of myself with some really exclusive '80s haircuts. I'm tempted to get one of those pictures and make a limited-edition "My Darkwave" comp.

Can you tell us a bit about doing demos with Britney Spears?
Ivy Roger, Blackheath

I'd never met a Mouseketeer before. You know, a professional entertainer. I've never met Justin Timberlake, but Justin Timberlake seems to be beyond fear. All of my friends are ready to stay home, ready to second guess it, they're all tied up inside like punk rock Woody Allens. So we went in, "Hey, do you wanna sing something?" Britney said, "Yeah!" And just went for it in front of us. I thought, 'I don't know how to fucking deal with a person like this.' We tried to write lyrics. I thought we could play her some music and see how she responded. So we were playing Suicide: "Does any of this surprise or excite you?" She was very professional and, I felt, she was immune to a

STEFAN HOEDERATH/REDFERNS; TABATHA FIREMAN/REDFERNS

certain degree to many things we played. So it was a day of fucking around. Then she went away to lunch and never came back.

Tell us a funny Steve Albini story.
Charlie Gershowitz, Chicago
He's not a funny story guy. But I'm very close to Bob Weston. Steve and I know each other and we're polite to each other but I don't have Steve's email or phone number. I was aligning the tape machine – hey, ladies! – doing some mixes for the new LP. I was talking to Bob on FaceTime during Shellac rehearsals about problems I was having with the over-biasing. We're trying to remember how many volts kilohertz is at zero dp referencing +4. Bob said, "I think it's 1.34 volts..." We're both scratching our heads, then Bob shouts, "Hey, Steve! How many volts is one kilohertz at +4?" Steve just walks through the background, not even looking at him, and yells, "C'MON, BOB. IT'S POINT FOUR EIGHT SEVEN." I was like, "Oh, shit. Yeah, yeah. It's that."

You're a 47-year old man with a young child. What's your worst/most memorable softplay experience?
Mick Goodwin, Cheam
I've never been to a softplay place. When my child was not yet crawling, my wife and I had a play mat on our floor. I realised that on one side of this mat, if he were able to crawl, the first object he would've encountered was one of those giant paper guillotines that's basically a machete on a hinge. So we took away the baby arm remover and got rid of the electrical cables and that is my version of soft play. Is he a fan of the band? My son loves everybody in the band and crew. He thinks concerts are when you basically go backstage, eat the rider and get on the bus. Some well-meaning guy is going to take his kid and a bunch of his friends, including my son, to a concert as a birthday party one day. My son's gonna be super excited until they get to the show, then he'll be like, "What the living fuck are we doing out here? Where's the catering?"

Volts into style: Steve Albini, 2005

"I'd never met a mouseketeer": Britney in 2003

I have plans for a residential property empire, in the manner of Donald Trump. What/where is the new Brooklyn going to be?
Dave Richardson, New York
Something inside me has just died. 'Cos every time I search inside myself for the answer, the fact that I can probably come up with it creates a death. I won't say because I don't want anybody moving to these places. It would just ruin a bunch of other people's lives. But, hey, I'll say Rockaway. If you could have all the benefits of gentrification the only one I'd want, without all the other shit, would be really high-level coffeeshops.

Of your early DJ gigs, which were the most memorable?
Martha Anderson, Edinburgh
The first one. It was at the DFA office, New Year's Eve, 1999. We set up a DJ booth on a balcony. There were these ecstasy tablets called Mitsubishi going around at the time. I had two, broke them into quarters, put them on the four corners of the turntables, and just worked my way through them during my set. Apparently, this involved me playing "Mother Sky" by Can, so I could run out on the dancefloor and dance, 'cos it's so long. Then I'd play it again, so I could keep running back out.

East London or East Village?
Sheena Roberts, Oxford
I don't spend much time in the East Village right now, but I do spend a lot of time in east London. My wife was living in London when we met. She has a little council estate flat she bought and we kept it. It's a tiny, tiny place, but I deeply love it. I don't have fucking tens of thousands of records there, so I can just be a guy in a little place. I also partly worked on *American Dream* in London. We did some work at Paul Epworth's church in Crouch End and in one of the rooms at the Strongroom in Shoreditch. We spent most of the time in a place Al and Felix from Hot Chip have. ●

"I'm super proud": Murphy in 2004 after the success of "Losing My Edge" and "All My Friends"

"There comes a time you think, 'Dude, to your own self be true'"

TIM SOTER; PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES; FAIRCHILD ARCHIVE/PENSKE MEDIA VIA GETTY IMAGES

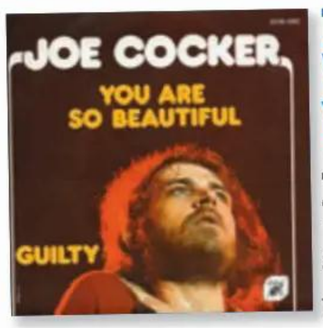
MY LIFE IN MUSIC
WAYNE COYNE

Neil on acid! The Beatles through one speaker! The strange listening experiences that shaped The Flaming Lips

Taken from *Uncut*, September 2010

THE FIRST RECORD I BOUGHT
CRASH LANDING 1975
JIMI HENDRIX

I'm not proud of this buy. It's one of many Hendrix records made after he died, completed by Alan Douglas with session musicians. My older brothers used to buy all the LPs I needed, but I bought this as nobody I knew owned it. So I was filled with glee, but that soon faded after putting it on. There's one great, crazy, distorted song, "Peace In Mississippi", but I'm not sure if Hendrix is even playing on it!

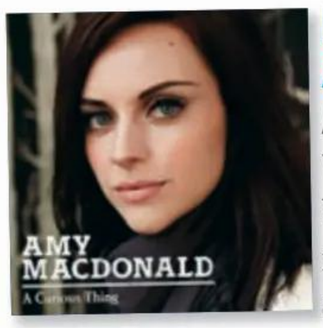


THE SONG L'D LIKE TO HAVE WRITTEN
YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL 1974
JOE COCKER

This is basically a piano vamp with Cocker singing the same line, "*You are so beautiful to me*", over and over, with hardly any other words. The chord changes go around in an endless cycle. It sounds so simple, but it's devastatingly effective; it's moving as hell. I think about songs I'd like to have written all the time, and they're usually very simple and functional. "Happy Birthday To You", that's a killer.

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF SONIC WEIRDNESS
SGT PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND 1967
THE BEATLES

My older brothers listened to music on an eight-track cartridge, but they didn't connect up their stereo system right. So for years all we could hear was the left side of the system. I listened to *Sgt Pepper* a lot, not realising that huge chunks of vocals and instruments were missing. When I hear a proper mix, it sounds wrong. My versions sound better! They have this eerie, empty quality.



MY GUILTY PLEASURE
A CURIOUS THING 2010
AMY MACDONALD

When you're young, you listen to certain music because it's cool. Then you stop caring about that. So no musical pleasures are guilty to me. I saw Amy sing at some festivals over the last few years and thought. 'Wow, this is powerful.' When listing new music I liked, I'd mention her, and people would be like, "You like that?" And I was like, " Sorry, she's not cool then?" But I was utterly blown away by her performances.

THE RECORD THAT TAKES ME BACK TO CHILDHOOD
LONELY DAYS 1970
THE BEE GEES

A strange arrangement, with spooky harmonies. It's sloppy, slightly out-of-time, and with bad hand claps instead of a drum kit... but I don't hear it often enough, and when I do it's like a time machine. Suddenly it's 1970, I'm in fourth grade, in love with my childhood crush. Music has that ability. It's a motherfucker. You never know which spot in your mind is going to be illuminated. It can be wonderful, or treacherous.

ROGER KISBY/GETTY IMAGES

MY FAVOURITE FILM SOUNDTRACK
PLANET OF THE APES 1968
JERRY GOLDSMITH

A landmark recording, and one that influenced the soundtrack to *Christmas On Mars*. Oddly, I don't think the music is used very well in the movie. But on its own it's fucking crazy. It's dense, cleverly written, sometimes atonal and shronky, and I still don't know what some of the sounds are. That's what I love about it. I don't think many girls are going to be dancing to it if you put it on at your house.

MY FAVOURITE PINK FLOYD ALBUM
MEDDLE 1971
PINK FLOYD

I veer between loving the Syd stuff and then going for the Roger Waters-driven era. But I'll pick *Meddle* as my favourite. It's a group effort. with lots of Gilmour vocals. I also like *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. That was until we re-recorded it last year. Now we're all sick of it, ha! We recorded every song in a weekend. It was entirely relaxed, no pressure, no desire for immortality. Often the best stuff is made like that.

THE FIRST MUSIC I HEARD ON ACID
HELPLESS 1970
CSNY

I'm often told our music has hallucinogenic properties, even though I don't like LSD much. I distinctly recall my first experience of hallucinogens, and this Neil Young song playing. There's something in the slide guitar part that is still a bad trigger for me – it haunts me to this day. In fact it's probably derailed the interview! It's crazy how a sweet, benign song can become freighted with danger because of your own experience of it.

MY FAVOURITE JAZZ ALBUM
BITCHES BREW 1970
MILES DAVIS

I'm obsessed with Miles from [1969's] *In A Silent Way* up to about 1975. Whenever I want to hear music that's just a strange cacophony of sometimes melodic stuff, sometimes abstract stuff, I just have to listen to that. It's not like pop music where you know every millisecond of it; it's sprawling, freaky stuff. Every time I solve one mystery about the album, 10 other mysteries pop up behind it.

MY FAVOURITE DANCE RECORD
SOUND OF SILVER 2007
LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

For me, dance music works by establishing a trance – one that relaxes your mind – but it can also be very dense. James Murphy is amazing. I saw LCD Soundsystem the other night, and there were moments where it reminded me of Black Flag in the early '80s, when Greg Ginn would do these long, strange guitar jams. LCD were making music that was hypnotic and dancey, but with real rock intensity. ● ***INTERVIEW: JOHN LEWIS***

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